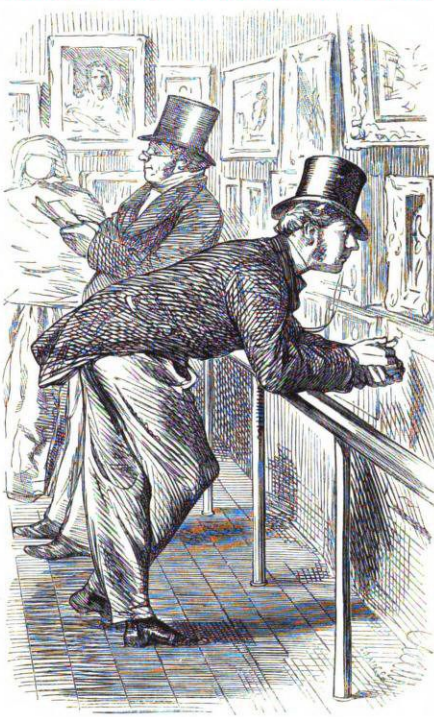


THE FOUNDATION OF MY PICTURE-GALLERY.

I AM unfortunate enough to "have a taste" and very little money; indeed I am doubly and trebly unfortunate, for this makes my third "taste." Once upon a time (not in the days of the fairies, but during my first term at college), it was ancient editions of the Greek classics, bound in vellum, clasped in brass, with wonderful and frousty texts, all abbreviations of the most complex kind, and paper of the brownest hue. This "taste" cost me all my "tin," more than all my patience, and, what is worse, nearly all my eyesight. I see, of course, at the present moment, and fully intend to see, but then it is now through the medium of spectacles.

Some years after came "Taste" Number Two. I became mad after mezzotints, I raved after prints in general, and grew positively dangerous about line-engravings. I am not a great pedestrian, indeed I prefer sitting, with an occasional lounge on my back, to any other position: but I think during the three years of Taste Number Two's reign, I must have walked at the very least something over eight thousand miles in search of "subjects." I went into new book shops, old book shops, curiosity shops, ladies' wardrobe shops, lumber shops, old furniture shops, frame shops, undertakers' shops, all sorts of shops. The only questions I ever asked anybody, anywhere, at any time, during those three years, were, I firmly believe, "How d'ye do?" and "Have you any old engravings for sale?"

And then, when after a day's march I had secured my spoil, how I used to gloat over it! Up during the night with a great goggle-eyed magnifying glass of gigantic power and proportions, lighting all the candles I could get and a lamp besides; going over each superficial inch



of lines; noting down in sleepy but vigorous characters my opinion of Greatbach's arm fore-shortenings, of Berse-neff's flesh lines, of Fittler's draperies. And, good Lord! how they used to laugh at me! What names they used to call me and my engravings, and how heartily they used to consign us (my engravings and me) to I shan't say what old gentleman in Chiaroscuro! Well, Taste Number Two was gathered to its fathers in due time, and a new king reigned in its stead.

One Saturday morning in the spring of the present year, fortified by a ticket from Messrs. Smith of Bond Street, "et quelque diable aussi me poussant," I strolled down St. James's and into Bridge-water House, to look at Lord Elles-

mere's pictures. I looked and was looked at; for I confess I had on peg-tops of a most aggravated form, and I saw several fat old females (with small hampers on their arms) seated on the noble Earl's benches, examining my left ankle with the right eye, and my right ankle with the left eye, and the Raffaelles and Titians of course with the *other* eye.

I prowled about the princely gallery, thinking of anything, or nothing, of the Countess's lost jewels, of the fat old lady's well-secured small hamper, certainly not of Art high, low, or middle, when a small picture (No. 244 in the catalogue) suddenly caught my eye, attracted me, seized me, bound me, enchained me, and has never let me go since. I am at this present moment, and have been for the last four months, manacled: my gaoler's name is Gerard Dow.

Talk of the Spitzbergs, and the Vicarias, and the Fiombi, and the Conciergeries, and the Newgates—I could escape from all of them consecutively,

but from Gerard Dow!—O beware, reader! of No. 244 in the catalogue!

I left Bridgewater House that morning (escorted of course by a double Gerard Dow, before and behind) with a new "taste." I met a friend in the Burlington Arcade, and ravenously inquired if he had, or if he knew of, any specimen of the high Dutch school? My friend piques himself rather on being philosophical and facetious, and he suggested Mynheer Van Dunk, expressing at the same time his entire approval of that venerable Bourgeois's spirited performance in "brandy and water day." I turned from the man in disgust, and Gerard Dow took me along Oxford Street, on the south, or fishy, side, looking at everything and everybody with an eyeglass that seemed to say, fiercely: "Why the deuce are you not of the high Dutch school?"

I was getting desperate, I felt all over Gerard Dow, and Heaven only knows what would not have happened, had not a very small picture in a very large frame attracted my notice. I rushed into the shop: "Is that of the Dutch school?" Seller couldn't say; might be; didn't know anything at all about it. "What's the price?" Well, the price *was* twenty guineas, and cheap too, but I might have it for eighteen. No; I didn't care about it at that price, but (Gerard Dow was pinching me all over) but if he could state the lowest figure, &c., &c. Well, I might take it for fifteen guineas. I was going to decline this offer also, but Gerard Dow within and without me multiplied himself infinitely, choked me, and—I bought it!

The picture came home, and I was brought with it. Large blue-mouldy stains covered the principal figures. I got on my knees and washed it with—no matter. The stock of silk and saliva I exhausted on that picture might form an item in Mr. Gladstone's revised budget next year. I rubbed, and breathed, and oil'd, and polish'd, like a machine, for two days and two nights without intermission, save for food (consisting of Gerard Dow and a mutton chop). With the early dawn of the third day I perceived on the collar of one of the secondary personages (a female) something like a delicate fret-work of lace. Machinery in motion again;—more rubbing, more oil, more breathing, more silk, more saliva, and the lace-work became clearer and more distinct. A thought—an awful thought—struck me. I rushed to the British Museum reading-room (conveyed by at least a quadruple Gerard Dow) and ransacked the catalogues for works on painting; attendants in obedience to my call came, — all books from the pit of the stomach up to the eyebrows; and I peered into them—those books, from Dr. Waagen's downwards, in hopes of a description of *my* little painting with the big frame. And I and Gerard Dow within me found it, moreover. And then home again; but, oh! with what speed and apprehension. What, if—during my absence—the house had caught fire, and the whole fire-brigade had failed to save my painting? What if my little nephew, with that new box of tools, had removed all doubts and difficulties by planing away the surface? What if, through the influence of the main-drainage works, the walls had fallen in? I breathed freely only on

again beholding my treasure and feeling it all over. And then I rubbed at the lace collar again, and felt my knees giving way, and my whole body assuming a position of religious awe, as the lace-work grew by degrees into—letters of fantastic shape, 'tis true: but still letters—and such letters—good Heavens! a G and an E and an R, and then an A, another R and a D; then a blank (just under the chin), and then a larger D and an O and—— Yes it was! I fell back shrieking the name—Gerard Dow!

I have the picture now. I have put it into a small portable joss-house, and I worship it daily, and sometimes nightly. When I have venerated it till my eyes are tired, I put on lemon-kid gloves, shut my eyes, and gently knuckle it behind, so that my ears may drink in the sounds proceeding from the wondrous panel. In a word I have Taste Number Three, and I have laid the foundation of my picture-gallery. S. O. M.



RACHEL.

ILLNESS and sorrow had done their work upon Randolph Grey. He was so altered, that his best friends would scarce have known him; for the mental was even greater than the physical change. The depression of his spirits was such, that it appeared as if nothing could rouse him. Formerly cordial and warm-hearted, he now exhibited a morbid desire for solitude, and shunned all those who had been the companions of his happier days. This might be, in part, attributable to impaired health, but cause and effect were closely allied, and if bodily weakness tended to depress his spirits, their depression effectually impeded the recovery of his strength. His physician recommended change of air and scene, and adverted to the bracing effects of sea-breezes, and the patient acquiesced with more readiness than might have been expected from his now habitual apathy.

But Captain Grey himself had become weary of remaining in town; his spirit turned with loathing from the turmoil of the great city. He longed to escape, not only from every face he knew, but from the unknown myriads whose very existence in his vicinity seemed to him an oppression and a constraint. His place of abode by the sea was not prescribed; he would seek it where he might be most secure of the solitude for which he longed. He decided upon a small fishing village on the Cornish coast, not far from the Land's End; nor could he have found a place that better answered his requirements. There was not even a gentleman's house within a distance of several miles, and the village itself consisted merely of fishermen's huts, diversified by one small general shop, which was also the post-office, to which letters came in small numbers and at rare intervals, the school, the church, the parsonage, and a farm-house in which Randolph Grey found board and lodging. The scenery was bare, but bold and romantic; and there was a fine rocky beach, where he could wander or sit for hours when not disposed to breast the waves in one of the fishing-smacks. Such a residence would answer perfectly for the two or three weeks that he intended to devote to the dreary luxury of perfect solitude; for solitude peopled with sad thoughts is dreary indeed.

Four or five days passed, or were dreamed away by him, chiefly in sitting on the beach and gazing listlessly upon the rolling of the waves. He had loved them as a child, but their monotonous murmur failed to soothe him, for with it mingled the voices of those who had brightened existence to him in those early days, and from whom the separation, by death, absence, or estrangement, made it so gloomy now. As he gazed and listened, he grew more sad, more listless, more desponding. The loneliness he had sought oppressed him, yet he knew it not, and shrunk but the more morbidly even from the sight of the poor fishermen of the coast.

One evening he was sitting on the beach, beneath the shadow of a projecting rock, immersed as usual in his gloomy musings, when his attention was arrested by the unwelcome sound of an approaching footsteps. He turned, and to his surprise,

beheld a female figure advancing along the rocks which jutted out beyond the spot where he was seated into a kind of promontory, against the extreme point of which the advancing tide was beginning to ripple.

His first impulse was to retreat at once, but he was checked by the reflection that the rock beneath which he sat would doubtless conceal him, whereas if he rose he should be exposed to view; and, moreover, with his attention had been aroused some spark of latent curiosity, which induced him to stay and watch the movements of the stranger. She was not one of the peasant women of the district; her dress, though simple, as befitted the crags and waves amidst which it was worn, was evidently that of a gentlewoman. He could only conclude her to be the wife of the clergyman. With a light, firm step she advanced along the jagged rocks till she had reached the end of the little promontory. There she sat down. A slight, very slight, breeze came in from the sea, and she took off her bonnet and turned to meet it, as if to let it play the more freely around her brow. He could now see her face plainly. It gave him the impression of one recovering from recent illness; for though still young it was pale, and looked worn and almost haggard. She sat for some time with folded hands, gazing fixedly out to seaward; her countenance growing ever sadder as she gazed. At length he heard a long deep-drawn sigh, and, turning away from the sea, she leaned her head against the rock, and wept.

The curiosity, not to say the interest, of Captain Grey was excited; there was a strange similarity between this woman's situation and his own. Like him, she came with her load of sorrow to seek comfort from the lonely shore, the restless waves; like him, she failed to find it. Could she indeed be, as he had imagined, the clergyman's wife? In a tranquil home, in the midst of duties, surrounded by ties, in a position that seemed to him so happy because it contrasted so forcibly with his own—what secret grief could be eating to her heart's core?

While he was thus pondering, the twilight was closing in, and silently the tide had risen around them. It was time to retreat. The stranger raised her head, and wiped away her tears; then rose, and after one more long gaze over the darkening sea, put on her bonnet, and retraced her steps over the rocks. The waves had by this time flowed completely round their base, forming a channel between them and the beach, which, though by no means dangerous, might be difficult to cross. This Captain Grey observed; and, passing round the rock that she might not discover how near he had been to her, he approached from the opposite side, and bowing, offered his hand to help her. She seemed surprised, even startled; but she accepted his assistance, bowed her thanks in silence, and they passed on their several ways without having exchanged a word.

The next day the clergyman of the parish called upon Randolph Grey. Learning that a stranger had taken lodgings at the farm, he thought it right to ascertain whether he could be of any service to him. Captain Grey had no opportunity of avoiding this well-meant visit, as he would

probably have desired; for, as he chanced to be at home, the landlady ushered Mr. Wood at once into the parlour.

Though his duties were confined to so remote a spot, and to a sphere so narrow, Mr. Wood was a man of education and ability; and it is possible that the solitude of the last few days had made the sound of a friendly voice less unwelcome to

Randolph Grey than he would have admitted even to himself. Certain it is, that the clergyman's conversation so far won upon him, that his heart was unlocked to give him some slight intimation of the reasons which had induced him to seek this secluded retreat, that the two gentlemen sate long in discourse together, and that before the visit ended, Captain Grey had accepted the pressing



invitation of his new acquaintance to drink tea at the parsonage on the following evening, and when the time came, stimulated perhaps by curiosity to see the clergyman's wife, he addressed himself to the fulfilment of his engagement with less reluctance than he would fain have persuaded himself that he felt. When he was introduced to Mrs. Wood, however, he was well-nigh disappointed to find how well she answered to his pre-conceived idea of what she ought to be. She was some years younger than her husband, and appeared as active, brisk, and cheerful a little woman as one could wish to see—happy in her home, her husband, and her duties. His conjectures about the stranger were all at fault, and he was pondering how he could frame an inquiry concerning her without betraying the scene which he had witnessed, when he was spared the trouble by Mr. Wood, who, seeing tea was ready, inquired of his wife whether "Rachel" were not well that she had not yet made her appearance.

"She is coming down directly," replied Mrs. Wood, "and I am glad of it. I think she has seemed more depressed than usual for the last few

days, and a little society will perhaps do her good. She is a lady who is living with us," added Mrs. Wood, in explanation to her guest.

At that moment the door opened, and "Rachel" entered. She was indeed the Lady of the Rocks; and as Mr. Wood introduced him to Miss Morland, Captain Grey perceived that she recognised him, though apparently with little interest, and no embarrassment. She thanked him courteously for the assistance he had rendered her, which led to an explanation of their meeting, and of their mutual surprise at seeing in so lonely a spot a stranger above the condition of a peasant.

After this Miss Morland lapsed into silence, leaving it to Mr. and Mrs. Wood to sustain the conversation with their guest; but his interest was excited, and he examined her closely. She might almost have been called handsome, or rather striking, for her beauty was less that of form or colouring than of expression, although now her countenance was melancholy almost to gloom. He thought he perceived in her the same listless despondency of which he himself so well knew the bitterness; and his sympathy being thus

excited, he exerted himself to relieve it by attracting her interest and attention. He could be very agreeable when he wished it; and now he succeeded perhaps all the better that his motive was a kind and unselfish one. Mr. and Mrs. Wood were charmed with him, and even the melancholy Rachel at length looked up, and took her part in the conversation with some appearance of zest, and in doing so gave involuntary evidence of both a quick apprehension and a cultivated mind. As for Captain Grey, if he had helped to entertain others, he was himself rewarded, for he was astonished to find how quickly the time had slipped away; and still more so, to be forced to acknowledge to himself that he was by no means so oppressed and wearied by an evening passed in the society of his fellow-creatures as by an equal number of hours spent alone.

A beginning having thus been made, few days elapsed in which he did not meet the inhabitants of the parsonage. He questioned Mr. Wood about Rachel, but learnt very little. About two years before, the patron of the living had written to inquire whether Mr. Wood would admit as a boarder a lady with whom he was not personally acquainted, but whom he knew to be destitute of finding a home in some retired village on the seacoast. Understanding that her position was a very lonely one, and that it would be an act of kindness to do so, Mr. Wood agreed to receive her, and she had arrived two years before, dressed in the deepest mourning, and evidently in great affliction. She proved not only most amiable in disposition, but very valuable as an assistant in the parish, and her host and hostess had become sincerely attached to her. But open and unreserved as she appeared in other respects, she had never communicated to them her previous history: all she had ever said about it, was to beg they would not question her, as it was too painful to dwell upon. She had, however, at different times, made mention of a father and mother, a sister, and a cousin whom she had lost, and of the latter with such evident emotion that they imagined he had perhaps been her lover or affianced husband. She had now no relations living, or at least none with whom she kept up any intercourse. She was habitually calm and quiet, and now much more even in spirits than she had been at first, though still appearing at times greatly depressed; and even when Mr. and Mrs. Wood occasionally quitted their seclusion to visit some of their relations, Rachel, though pressed to accompany them, preferred remaining behind alone, to renewing, even slightly, her intercourse with the world.

To this scanty information Captain Grey listened with an interest which increased as he became more intimately acquainted with Miss Morland. His own morbid apathy had passed away. Every morning he arose, not as formerly, to a dreary blank, but to the interest of his new acquaintance, for he had now an object before him, that of winning her back at once from her sorrow and from her strict seclusion.

It did not seem that his efforts were fated to be unsuccessful: by degrees Rachel's listless depression appeared to yield to them, and she

awoke to the enjoyment both of the natural scenes around her and of the companionship and sympathy which brightened them; and when he saw the smile with which she greeted his approach, the evident pleasure which she took in his society, other feelings than those of disinterested kindness began, though at first unconsciously to himself, to dawn within him, and the day was a weary one to him in which, either in a visit at the parsonage or a ramble over the rocks, he had not enjoyed the society of Rachel. His evenings were always spent in her company, for it had become a settled thing that he should drink tea with the Woods, who, liking all they saw and all they heard of him, witnessed with pleasure his increasing intimacy with their friend.

The three weeks originally proposed as the term of his stay had long since elapsed, but he had found means to prolong it under different pretexts, until autumn was now far advanced. He felt that he could not linger on for ever without any settled aim or purpose, and it crossed his mind that in doing so he might not be acting honourably towards Miss Morland, should she indeed feel any greater pleasure in his company than in that of merely an agreeable acquaintance. He rejected the unwelcome scruple as the offspring of vanity, but could not banish it from his mind, and at length reluctantly resolved to depart the following week. He went up to the parsonage, purposing to inform his friends of his intention, and was himself astonished at the pain this decision cost him, and to find that his step was once more as slow and weary as it had been when he first sought his present abode. It was a relief to him to be informed that Mr. and Mrs. Wood were gone out for the day, and that Miss Morland was walking. He felt relieved. Perhaps he had been over-hasty; there was no occasion for him to go quite so soon; at all events he should have time to think the matter over. Mechanically he bent his steps towards the sea-shore: often and often he had wandered there with Rachel Morland; was he after a few brief days to do so no more? Whichever way he turned his eyes, her image seemed to flit before them: should he have courage to banish it from his memory, or would it haunt him thus in every place? As he rounded a small headland, absorbed in these questionings, he almost started to see her in life and limb seated on the sands at a little distance from him. He thought how much she was altered since the first time he had seen her,—then, as now, gazing forth over the boundless waters. The haggard paleness of her cheek had given place to a delicate but more life-like hue; and if her countenance still bore the impress of some past sorrow, the look of hopeless despondency was gone. Was this indeed his work? Would it be undone by his departure? And if so, could he, *ought* he, to tear himself away?

The sound of his footsteps was scarcely audible on the soft sand, and she did not perceive him till he stood beside her and addressed her. The sad serious look instantly vanished from her face, and it was with the bright smile to which he was now accustomed, that she turned to welcome him. But it met no answering smile, for, inexplicably to

himself, that look of welcome strengthened him in his purpose.

"Is anything the matter, Captain Grey?" asked Rachel, alarmed at the grave melancholy gaze which met hers.

"I am thinking how soon the happy days of my stay here must end; for I return to town next week," was Randolph's reply.

The light faded from Rachel's eyes, and her cheek grew suddenly pale.

"Going away so soon? Is it necessary?"

"Yes, I am afraid it is."

She sighed and turned away her head.

"Will you really sometimes miss me, Miss Morland?"

"How could I do otherwise?" replied she, simply. "You have been very kind to me; and the loss of a friend is no trifle in so lonely a life as mine," she added in a low tone, while the tears rose to her eyes.

This was too much for the faltering resolution of Randolph Grey. Obeying the impulse which urged him on, in an instant he was seated on the sand beside her, clasping her hands in his—pouring forth the confession of his love, and entreating her to say that they need never part; that neither her life nor his should henceforth be lonely. He spoke eagerly, for he was full of hope, but a chill passed over him as he gazed on the face of Rachel.

With cheeks as pale as marble, and eyes dilated as if they beheld some appalling vision, she listened to him motionless and unresponsive. At length she strove to withdraw her hand, but he held it fast.

"Rachel! what is this? Surely my words cannot take you by surprise; you cannot have been unconscious of my affection! Speak to me—speak, I entreat you!"

"I will," said Rachel, faintly. "I was blind, very blind; but I see it all now; and I have sinned and must bear the penalty. You must leave me, Captain Grey. We must part, and for ever;—leave me, pray leave me."

"I cannot leave you thus."

He could not indeed, for she was almost fainting, and would have sunk down upon the sand, had he not thrown his arm round her to support her.

"Rachel," he continued passionately, "Rachel, what does this mean? for verily I believe you love me, and why would you cast me from you?"

Rachel made no answer, for she could not; her head sank upon his shoulder, and she burst into a passion of tears. They seemed to relieve her, for in a few moments she grew calmer and gently disengaged herself from his hold.

"I cannot speak to you now," she said softly, "but if you will meet me here to-morrow evening, about this time, all shall be explained. You will then see that insuperable obstacles interpose between us. Leave me for the present; we can meet as usual this evening at the parsonage, but leave me now I entreat you."

She spoke earnestly, beseechingly: and without a word he obeyed; but when he had reached the furthest point whence he could see her, he turned to look—Rachel still sat where he had left her, motionless beside the foam.

They met in the evening, but Miss Morland

was pale, depressed and preoccupied, and Randolph Grey, who watched her intently, could by no effort command his usual flow of conversation, and took his leave early. To him the intervening hours passed wearily and restlessly. He longed for the interview with Rachel which would end his suspense; yet he dreaded it, for might it not also extinguish his hopes? But even the longest day comes to a close, and the days were not of the longest now.

Before the appointed time Captain Grey was on the beach, wandering amongst the rocks, and advancing to the jutting point where he had first seen Rachel. The recollection of that hour came vividly across his mind as he seated himself on the rock where she had sat; he gazed out upon the heaving sea, which seemed to him as restless as his own unquiet heart. Even as he was gazing he heard Rachel's footstep upon the rocks. Silently he made way for her, and silently she seated herself beside him. For a moment he took her hand and looked into her face with a pang of self-reproach for the change he read there. She was paler, more haggard than he had ever seen her, even in the days of their earliest acquaintance, and her eyes heavy and dim with weeping; but she was quite calm now. For a few minutes they sat in silence, which was first broken by Randolph.

"Pray do not prolong this suspense; let me know what it is you have to tell me."

"This!" replied she, extending to him her ungloved left hand. There was a wedding-ring upon the third finger.

A livid paleness passed over Randolph's countenance, as he exclaimed:

"Is it possible—a wife? Rachel!"

"The wife of a dead husband; for I dare not say his widow."

In explanation she proceeded to acquaint him briefly with the history of her life, of which the outline is as follows:

She was early left an orphan, and was brought up in the house of a relation. While both very young an attachment was formed between herself and a cousin, a young man of some property, but of indifferent character. This attachment was vehemently opposed by the uncle and aunt with whom she lived; but as they, at the same time, betrayed some anxiety to secure her hand, and her small but independent fortune for their own son, she was little inclined to heed their by no means disinterested warnings, and clung to Herbert Maxwell the more tenaciously the more his character was impugned; for she believed him to be unjustly accused, and even in the contrary case, this, as it might estrange other friends, would but be a reason why she, who had loved him almost from childhood, should stand by him the more firmly; and thus no sooner was Rachel of age, than she was married to Herbert Maxwell, and cast off by her offended relations. Their warnings, however, though not prompted by the best motives, were no calumnies, and Rachel's married life proved most unhappy. Herbert was a gambler and a spendthrift,—reckless, dissipated, and unprincipled. Yet he had some attaching qualities, and Rachel loved him through all—the more so that, inconsistent as it

might seem, his strongest feeling appeared to be love of his wife, which took the line of rendering him jealous of her to a degree often painful to herself, and equally unwarranted by her conduct and his own. Her life was one of ceaseless anxiety, like that of a person walking on the brink of a volcano, which may at any moment burst forth and overwhelm him.

As time wore on, Rachel observed that a change had come over her husband. She had been used to see him gay and thoughtless, but now he seemed restless and anxious, — his gaiety forced and overstrained. Whatever might be the cause it was carefully concealed, and his wife's inquiries were eluded by some jesting reply that failed to allay her anxiety. It grew with the deepening gloom she saw gathering over Herbert. At length he could no longer jest with her, or, when he attempted it, his hollow laughter was more painful than sighs. Then even this ceased, and his very looks told a tale of despair. His wife plied him with direct questions, and he in return commanded silence, but she would not yield her point; she implored him to confide in her affection, — to let her share his sorrow, be the cause of it what it might. He resisted still, but less sternly, — finally he bade her follow him to his study, and locked the door.

Wild, haggard desperation was written on his countenance, as vehemently pacing the room he began to speak rapidly. He told her that he was a ruined and dishonoured man; no ordinary bankrupt, but one who dared not to look his fellow-men in the face; that his name was become a by-word and a reproach, and that this misery — with the addition of seeing his beautiful young wife involved in it — was more than he could bear.

She would have asked him what he had done; but he forbade all questioning: "he was not sunk so low that he could bear to be disgraced in the eyes of his own wife." He added with increasing vehemence that if he were alone, he could soon end this suffering, and escape from the shame that weighed him to the earth.

This did not surprise Rachel, who having often already, and especially of late, heard him allude to the idea of emigration, now interpreted his words as referring to it.

"But," continued he, "one fear withholds me. I cannot face the thought that were I no longer here, you, Rachel, might perhaps forget me."

"Herbert! Surely, surely you would take me with you!"

He looked at her strangely, fixedly. "No, that I could not do; and when I was gone my memory would fade from your mind, and you might learn to love some other man."

"Oh! Herbert, how can you speak so cruelly?"

"Ah!" said he with almost a groan, "but for that fear I should soon cast this misery behind me."

"Then, Herbert," she replied; "go where you will, so you be not happy. Do not let me be the obstacle in your way. Surely you know — you feel, that, absent or present, I can love none but you. Surely you can trust me to keep you

alone, unrivalled, in my heart until we meet again."

"Oh! that I could believe you! For I could not rest, even in the grave, if I thought that you could bestow that which once was mine upon another. Will you dare to give me your promise, Rachel?"

"Assuredly I will."

"But first consider," he resumed more eagerly. "You must hide yourself from the world, renounce my name, efface every trace of your ill-fated, *disgraceful* marriage. Can you do this, and never inquire the cause?"

"I can — I will."

"Then promise me."

He stood before her and took both her hands, while she said. "I give you my solemn promise that none other shall occupy your place in my heart until we meet again."

"And mark," cried he, almost fiercely gripping her hands between his own; "mark, that from the very ends of the universe I should come back to you to enforce that promise, were you ever tempted to break it."

"I never can be."

"Then you have set me free." He loosed her hands, and before she had time to comprehend his purpose, he had caught up a pistol from the table, and pointed it at his own forehead. There was a sharp report and he fell at her feet, the blood spirting up upon her clothes, and even to her hands and face. With a piercing shriek she rushed to the door, which she struggled wildly to open, but in vain. She had but one desperate thought, the impossibility of obtaining help, and then she remembered nothing more.

Her cry had been heard, and assistance came, but too late for Herbert; his suicidal weapon had done its work. For two days Rachel lay in a species of death-trance, from which she awoke to rave in the delirium of brain fever. She was nursed through it by her servants. With her relations all intercourse had so completely ceased that they knew not whom to send for, and the newspaper intelligence of the sad event did not induce them to come forward. At length Rachel's naturally strong constitution gained the upper hand, and she recovered her reason; and, by very slow degrees, her strength. The clergyman of her parish having learnt the sad particulars of the case, had obtained access to her in virtue of his profession, but she positively refused to see any one except himself. She seemed absolutely prostrated both in mind and body, and for some time appeared incapable of the slightest exertion. When at length her powers were in some degree restored, her first wish was to obey the injunctions of her husband, which accorded well with her own feelings, and to seek concealment and entire seclusion. With equally implicit obedience to his commands, she made no inquiries concerning the past. Her own small fortune had been settled upon herself at her marriage, and all else was abandoned to her husband's creditors. She resumed her maiden name of Morland, wore her wedding-ring fastened to a chain round her neck; and having, thanks to the inquiries [of the clergy-

man, obtained the promise of a kindly shelter in the quiet parsonage of Mr. Wood, she retired thither with but one wish, that of dragging out the remainder of her desolate life in seclusion, and in such peace as it might afford her. She thus withdrew from all intercourse with the outer world, grew attached to the Woods, in whom she found kind and faithful friends, and shared their labours for the good of those committed to their care; yet life appeared to her a sad and weary load, and her only solace was in the murmur of the waves, for to them alone could she reveal the secret of

her grief, which, as though it were a trust from her departed husband, she kept locked from every human eye in the depths of her heart. Yet this afforded her but meagre consolation.

The day on which Randolph Grey had first beheld her, being the anniversary of her husband's death, she had felt more than usually depressed and miserable. Not only the sorrows of the past, but the hopeless dreariness of the future weighed heavily on her spirit. The latter had been partly, at least, dispelled by the growing interest for Captain Grey, which, unknown to herself, had ripened into a strong feeling of at-



tachment, and it was only the avowal of his love which woke her to the painful consciousness, at once of the strength of his influence over her, and of her involuntary infidelity to the promise plighted to her husband. But no sooner was she conscious of the offence than she determined on the expiation—separation, immediate and eternal, from him whose attractions had caused this dereliction, for so she considered it, from her duty. Such an expiation was bitter indeed!

This fact, which though not admitted in direct terms, was but too evidently betrayed both by Rachel's words and manner, caused Randolph Grey to listen to her narrative, with painful emotion indeed, but without despair.

Earnest and eloquent were his pleadings with her to induce her to alter her view of her own case—to reconsider her determination. The argument on his side was by no means untenable, for a pro-

mise given under a false impression, and that false impression to all appearance designedly conveyed, would hardly have been considered binding if plighted to a living man—and upon what principle was Maxwell's death to make it so? Should it not rather have set her free?

Such were Randolph's reasonings, and Rachel's own heart was his most powerful auxiliary, though she earnestly strove to resist him, and to cling to that which she conceived to be her duty at once to the dead and to herself. Will it be thought wonderful that after long persuasion he induced her to submit the case to Mr. and Mrs. Wood, whose opinion, especially that of the former, as a clergyman, could not but have great weight with her.

Randolph Grey did not much fear their decision; and he was right, for they espoused his cause, Mrs. Wood at once, her husband after due deli-

beration. He did not think it right that Rachel's whole life should be sacrificed to a delusion, and he believed that her union with Captain Grey would secure her happiness. Their arguments were therefore added to his persuasions; and, after much hesitation, Rachel yielded. Yet it seemed as if her decision, though in accordance with her own inclinations, was powerless to make her happy, so strong were still her scruples, so constantly recurring her doubts whether she were not doing wrong. In Randolph's presence all was well, but in solitude they would return upon her mind with double force; and it required all his eloquence to restore to her her peace of mind, and reconcile her conscience to the step she had taken.

A fortnight thus passed away, and it became necessary that Captain Grey should go to London to make the arrangements indispensable for his marriage, which in accordance with Rachel's wish, was to be celebrated in her present abode, with the utmost privacy. He was very unwilling to leave his pale and mournful bride, especially in so uneasy and excited a frame of mind; but there was no help for it, and all he could do was to hurry the proceedings as much as possible.

He was absent only a week, but on his return he was inexpressibly shocked to perceive the change, which even in so short a time had taken place in Rachel. She was worn to a shadow, and her eyes had acquired an anxious, terrified expression, very painful to behold. At her first meeting with him, she appeared greatly agitated, and even after it, he could not conceal from himself that she shunned his society. When he perceived that in the lapse of a few days this had not worn off, and that her nervous depression of spirits perceptibly increased, while Mr. and Mrs. Wood were totally unable to account for the change, he resolved to question her, and one day having succeeded in finding her alone, he inquired of her the cause of the alteration he perceived.

Her agitation was so excessive that it was some time before she could speak, but at length she informed him, with many tears, that they must no longer look forward to any happiness together, for that their marriage could never take place. It was vain to struggle, or to hope—it was impossible, and she must submit to her fate.

The reason was a fearful one, and she shuddered, and her very lips grew white, as, in answer to Grey's inquiries, she told him that if she had failed to keep her promise, her dead husband had kept his, and was come back, as he had threatened, even from the ends of the universe, to reproach her with her broken vow. She had not seen him, she had not heard his voice; but whenever she was alone, by night or day, she was conscious of an invisible presence near her. She had striven to believe it a delusion—but in vain—she could not be deceived. Towards night she was most miserable when alone, for in the dark the sense of this unearthly companionship became almost unendurable; and yet she feared to have a light, for turn which way she would, she saw an undefined shadow cast upon the wall, which was even more terrible than the viewless presence that haunted her in the darkness. She felt that such torment if prolonged must drive her mad, and that she

had no alternative, but to renounce all hope of earthly happiness by parting from Randolph Grey.

He, on his side, believed her to be the victim of some delusion, caused by distress of mind and weakness of nerve, and strove to reason her out of her belief. He determined that she should be alone as little as possible, and even persuaded her to let Mrs. Wood's maid sleep in her room at night. For the present he contented himself with entreating her to suspend her decision, for he trusted to his influence over her, and being persuaded that, whatever her nerves might be, her mind was not affected, he had little doubt that he should succeed in bringing her to consent to his wishes. But he found the task more difficult than he had anticipated. At first, indeed, Rachel appeared more cheerful, and suffered herself to be persuaded not actually to break off their engagement; but her resolution varied with her spirits, and if ever she were left alone, the same conviction of a companionship, the more awful because not cognizable by her senses, resumed possession of her mind.

The suspense at length became almost intolerable, even to Grey himself, whose love for Rachel grew but the stronger in proportion to the uncertainty of his hopes, and the compassion he felt for the sufferings which told painfully upon her bodily health. He therefore resolved to put an end to it, bringing the affair, as he trusted, to a favourable conclusion; and the same evening he walked up to the parsonage, and having asked to see Miss Morland, was admitted to the small sitting-room reserved for her use.

She was seated alone, beside the embers of the dying fire, and there was no light in the room. She started at his entrance, and as she rose on recognising him, he could distinguish by the faint glow of fire-light the traces of tears upon her cheeks. He took her hand in both his own, murmuring "dearest Rachel!"

"Hush, hush!" she exclaimed, hurriedly, striving to withdraw her hand—then in a lower and trembling voice—"hush! we are not alone!"

Involuntarily Randolph started and looked round. The dim light sufficed to show him that no one else was present. It was only Rachel's delusion.

"This is but a fancy, Rachel," said he. "Do not indulge it. Let me light the lamp, and you will be able to satisfy yourself that there is no one with us."

"Do as you please," she replied, with a deep, quivering sigh. It is strange how contagious are nervous feelings! Randolph Grey smiled at his own weakness, for he could almost have fancied he heard it faintly echoed near him.

He lighted a candle lamp, and placed it on the table. Truly there was nothing visible even to the anxious eyes of Rachel as they wandered round the room. As soon as he saw her more tranquil, Captain Grey approached the subject which he had at heart. He began cautiously, for his object was no other than to win her consent to their immediate union. Every necessary step had been taken; nothing but her indecision yet delayed it. At first she started, and shrank almost with terror from the thought; but this he had foreseen, and once more he brought forward every argument he

could devise to combat her scruples; and, as he perceived that he gained some ground, he urged upon her that the suffering she now endured was only the result of nervous agitation caused by her indecision, and that when once the final step was taken, when there was no further room for hesitation, no possibility of drawing back, she would find peace, and, he ventured to trust, eventual happiness.

She made no answer. Silence, he hoped, gave consent.

"Then, Rachel," pleaded he, "why should we delay longer; why not end this suspense so painfully prolonged? Say that you will at length be mine."

"Be it as you will," replied she, faintly. "I feel that I am doing wrong; but I have no strength longer to resist you."

"You consent? Oh, Rachel! God bless you for your words. It shall be the study of my life to guard you from ever repenting them. You will then suffer our marriage to take place immediately—to-morrow?"

She covered her face with her hands and groaned; but when she again raised her head her only reply was—

"Yes—if you desire it."

"Rachel, now, indeed, I may look upon you as my affianced wife. Now, indeed, I may call you mine. You will not refuse to set a seal upon your words?—to grant me one kiss before we part to-night?"

"I have said," and her voice trembled so as to be scarcely audible: "I have said that I can refuse you nothing;" and she rose from her seat.

He drew near, and extended his arms to clasp her to his bosom. As he did so she slightly turned her head, and at the same moment uttered a piercing shriek. Randolph's eyes followed the direction of hers. There was but one light in the room, for the fire had burnt out, and the shadows of the two figures were traced sharply and distinctly upon the opposite wall—but—no, it was no delusion of Rachel's brain—there was a third, vague and undefined, which interposing between them, and waving aloft its misty arms, seemed forcibly to thrust them asunder.

At the sight Randolph involuntarily started back, and Rachel fell heavily to the ground.

Forgetful of all but her, he sprang to her side, and raised her in his arms. A wild cry for help brought Mr. and Mrs. Wood to the spot; but assistance came too late. The spirit of Rachel Maxwell had passed away. I.

SENTIMENT FROM THE SHAMBLES.

SAUNTERED with my friend through a busy street in B—, and our conversation taking a serious turn, I expressed myself somewhat as follows:

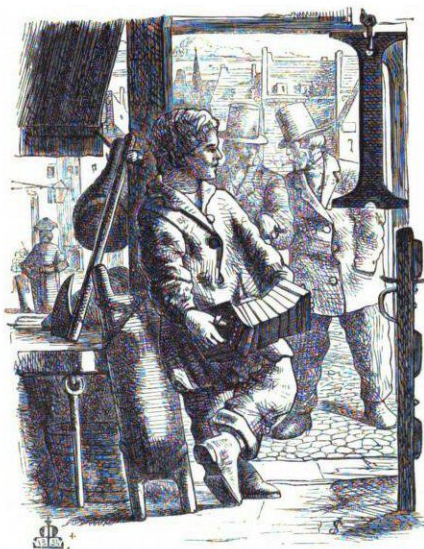
Each has his different bend of spirit; each his peculiar aptitude for receiving instruction. To some, the country with its shade and sunshine, singing birds and flowering hedges, is a mentor of mighty truths. To others, the city with its human hum, and groaning tread-wheel, ever turning, is a preceptor teaching of life, death, and eternity.

"And to which class do you belong?" said my friend.

"To the latter," I replied. "Not, perhaps, so much by nature as by circumstance. I have dwelt in the city until its many tones seem to me to blend into one cry, 'Come over and help us,' and the cry draws out my sympathies, and my sorrow, too; for what is individual help to the mass?"

"Well, as you please. I will take my pastime in the country and leave you to moody lucubrations, amid dingy houses and smoky chimney-pots. Give me rural scenes and sentiment!"

"Will you deny that sentiment is to be found in the city," I hastily inquired, yet half dreading a reply, knowing that my friend was strongly addicted to sarcasm.



"Surely not. Only I'd leave you to seek it."

"Agreed. I promise to find it in any corner you may choose."

"There, then," he promptly answered, at the same time pointing to a piece of pork out-hanging from a butcher's stall.

"In pork!" I feebly ejaculated, perceiving the case was a lost one.

"Well, perhaps, not exactly *in* it, but attach sentiment in ever so weak a form to fat pork, and I'm your humble servant for ever."

He triumphed, for I sought in vain.

Since then I have travelled all round the world, and that which I could not find at home I have found in the Antipodes. Now, judge between me and my sarcastic friend. The scene is Hobartton.

It had been a cold rainy day, and now was a damp cheerless night; for, though the rain had abated, the clouds still looked sulky, and the sky gave no promise of moon or stars to light me home through the bush. So to be independent of both, I took a lantern and set out. My way lay through the uncomfortable bit of uncleared land, to the left of Newtown. Every now and then I had to draw up before a charred trunk of a tree, and each time, though accustomed to the interruption, the same suspicion presented itself—namely, that a Ranger was advancing to meet me. Nor did my lantern assist me to a full definition of the figure, for in bringing its light to bear upon the trunk, the long black arms only seemed to stretch more

determinately towards me. In England such trees might be considered of the ghost-tribe; here, where fears are too much pre-occupied to think of supernatural appearances, a charred stump is not only a charred stump, but very often something *more*, especially if it be large and hollow. Well, I safely passed two, four, six stumps, and then remembering that there could not be many more, I bravely stepped out, breaking the unpleasant silence, or still worse cranch of my feet on the gravel, singing:

"My lot is cast in that blest place,"

to the tune of the Old Hundredth. My air and voice were decidedly defiant, until I neared the last stump, then I became sensible of a quaver in the latter. The coming stump, or rather the stump to which I was coming, was the most awkward of the lot—a thorough specimen of diablerie—on the top of a hideous-looking trunk, was perched a large round knot, bearing a resemblance to a human head. All this I knew, and was prepared for; but, in spite of being prepared, my heart and I stood still together before it. The black head wore a feather—a bright red feather—which blew furiously about in the wind. As I watched it, a hand emerged from the hollow and drew it in. Then came a voice from within.

"You can pass on."

I hesitated, when the permission was repeated.

"What are you?" I demanded, recovering my self-possession.

"Never mind, pass on; I'm harmless as yourself."

I glanced at the muzzle of a gun which peered through an aperture in the trunk, and doubted its accordance with peaceable intentions.

"Who are you?" I again demanded.

An answer in person was given; a man jumped out from the hollow and stood beside me.

"Don't let me see you!" I cried out; "don't put it in my power to witness against you."

"Look at me, I am no absconder," he replied.

I looked and saw a tall, grotesque figure, which I immediately recognised as belonging to an old man of Hobarton who gained his living by shooting small game in the neighbourhood. He doffed his opossum fur-cap, and bowed respectfully when his eyes met mine. I could not help laughing, so ridiculous had been my former fears. He seemed hurt; for, bending on his gun, he said:

"Ah, it's no laughing matter that brings me here! Bessie's my game to-night,—poor, fond, young crature, to leave her father's house, all for a cross word, which he has the right of nayture to speak to her."

He reminded me of King Lear; his long white hair blew about on his head, as the red feather had done from the top of the trunk, and for some moments he was too absorbed in grief to speak, and when he did, it was in short, broken sentences, as though all the world should know his Bessie. I gathered that she had left him a few days ago, and that his suspicions led him to watch for her from this spot.

"That bit of a kerchief," said he, "I stuck out from the pole, for if she passed she'd know it was mine, and meant for peace, and there was a word tied up in it begging her to come back."

He drew the kerchief across his eyes, and in it I acknowledged the former feather. Then, wrapping it around his throat, as if preparing to settle for the night, he bade me leave him. This I objected to do, and told him he was tempting Providence by exposing himself to the damp of the bush.

"Rheumatics take the damp!" he said. Then, fixing a searching eye on me, he added:—"Have you ever lost a child? Then I have, and by worse than death. Leave me, and the only favour I beg is, don't notice me when you meet me in town."

"But how about poor Bessie? I must hear if you find her."

"Ay, ay!" he nodded, and coiled himself back into his tree ere I could offer further opposition.

A few days after I saw him in Argyle Street, but forbore to remark him. With my face set steadily in front, I was about to pass by, when he made a full stop before me, took off his fur cap, and waited bareheaded till I should speak.

"Is she found?"

He seemed delighted that I pounced on the subject without preface. It convinced him that Bessie was the all in all engrossing occupation of other thoughts than his.

"She's heard of, and I know her whereabouts. I'd rather have seen her dragged dead out of the

river! A dead child ain't half the pain of a living one gone astray. A dead child can't come back if she'd fain, therefore a living one that won't is worse!"

A sentiment to which I could not say nay, for the testimony of ages is in its favour.

"Ah! I'm not so much a stranger in the colony," he went on to lament, "as not to know where these things end; and if once the government brown gets upon my Bess, she'll be none the better for it, and there's them as will gladly make her worse, out of spite that she's free to what they are. I tell you, sir, there ain't been no blot on our family for six generations back, and at home, for all that I'm poor to the back-bone, my word's as good as a bond. If my hands are seared, it's with work, and *not* with dirty actions! And my children was all counted fortunes in themselves; now I'm come out here with the last just to break my heart over her!"

His breast heaved, and what more he would say was lost in a smothered sob. To turn him to a more cheerful view of the case, I said:

"Well, but we must look to the brighter side, it may not be so bad after all."

"Not so bad! Let the worst come to the worst, or the best to the best, ain't she forgotten her Catechism and her Bible? When I was young, I was taught to honour my father and mother. But, I tell you what it is, sir," he lowered his voice, and spoke confidentially, "come what may, I don't blame the girl too much, for the sin lies at our door. We'd no business, my missus and me, to leave England in our old age—'twas pride from beginning to end. First, I could not trust the God that made me to provide for me when I got old; then, I wanted to see Bessie a lady. They told me that, out here, her bonny face would get her a rich husband, and now it's more like —" He broke short, and then said:—"Perhaps you'll step in and see missus, she's in a world of trouble, and it tells hard upon her, poor soul!"

We had all this while been walking, and when we had gone a little further we came to one of those hut-looking buildings still to be seen here and there in Hobarton. The door of this hut was locked, and Munro had the key in his pocket. Seeing my surprise, he remarked:—

"'Twas by her own wish. The neighbours come twitting of her with their pity, so says missus to me, 'Lock me in, John, and then I can't open to none of 'em.'"

We entered a wretched little room, exhibiting every token of poverty and dejection. It looked like a bereaved house, for there was neither sign of a recent fire nor of a mid-day meal, though it was past noon. All this my eye apprehended at a glance, while my attention riveted itself on an old woman who sat with her head buried in her arms, which rested on an open Bible lying before her on a small table.

"Missus," said her husband. But she answered not; she was in a dead sleep, sleeping the heavy sleep of sorrow. "Poor soul," whispered Munro, "I left her fretting over that text—'The way of transgressors is hard.' 'Oh, John!' says she to me, 'will Bessie's case ever come to that?'" 'God

knows!" says I, and then she laid down her head, and very likely she's stayed there since."

He motioned me to sit on a bench, and then, at my invitation, he also sat down, when the silence that ensued gave me an opportunity to make many observations, each of which strengthened my opinion of the poverty of the Munro family.

"Don't let me keep you from your dinner," I said, in order to discover whether he had any in prospect.

He appeared uneasy for an instant; then, with rather a grim smile, he replied. "Sorrow ain't an appetisable sauce."

I strongly suspected that other causes than sorrow kept him from eating, and longed to offer him some money to procure a meal; but there was a certain dignity in the handsome old Englishman

that held back my purse, and made me feel that a case of distress cannot always be relieved by money. He seemed to read my thoughts, for said he:

"I don't deny it's hard times; and if you were pleased to lend me a loan 'twould be more than a kindness, for I'm sadly gone back along; since Bessie went away, my time's been spent in seeking for her, instead of in bringing down pigeons."

He resolutely refused the trifle I proffered, but finally agreed to receive it as a loan, to be paid in weekly instalments of game.

"Well, I'm glad your debt will oblige you to use your gun again, for the exercise will help you to forget your trouble," I unfortunately said, in taking leave of him.

He gave me a look that might have been quizzical but for the tone that accompanied it:



[See p. 508.]

"Them that's got grey hair in their head can't ride the old soldier over trouble in that way."

The following week I found a pair of bronze-wing pigeons and three common parrots lying on the hall table; they were marked, "paid for." Beside them lay a little three-cornered note, which ran thus:—

HONORED SIR,—Bessie is lodging at the Blk Bear in Goltburn Street. She won't see me, but very like she will speak with a stranger, when you cold tell her that if she don't want this forrin mold to cover her poor old father and mother she will come home again to them that's her tru friends, to say nothing of him that's her God in heaven. So no more from Mr. and Mrs. Munro, from your humble servant, JOHN MUNRO.

Interpreting this into a request that I would go to Bessie, I set out for the Black Bear, and asked if one Bessie Munro lodged there. After some hesitation, it was admitted that she did, but was too ill to see any one. I perceived this to be a falsehood, and was turning in my mind how to accomplish an interview, when a portly, forbidding-looking woman came from behind a large folding screen that divided the tap-room from their private apartment. Not knowing the answer I had already received, she inquired my business; and, on being told, she deliberately stated that Bessie had only that minute "ran out on an arrant." A foolish smile passed from face to face, and

taking advantage of the confusion, I said, in a voice of authority, "Will any person have the goodness to call Bessie Munro: I shall begin to think she is detained against her will, unless I hear to the contrary from her own lips."

"And that you shan't!" cried the portly woman. "She's a quiet, indelphensive lodger, and she shan't be defied in my own house. I took pity on her when they that bore her drove her to doors—"

"Hush! no more of such falsehoods. You know Bessie's history as well as I do," I said: on which the woman dashed like a tempest behind the screen, and, led by an irresistible impulse, I followed her into the private room. There, standing on tiptoe, and listening with every eager feature, was one of the most beautiful young women I have ever seen. Possession was in my favour; so having obtained a footing I kept it, in spite of the landlady's abuse. I advanced to the young woman, and said:

"You need not tell me you are Bessie Munro; your likeness to your father has already told me that. I am come to beg you to return to your home; both your parents are willing to forgive you: it is in your power to make them very happy again."

"Oh, sir! I could never face them again; mother might forgive me, but father says he'll

break his gun across my shoulders if ever I darken his hut again."

"It's a lie!" I had cried before I could refrain: and then, to vindicate the assertion, I read Bessie her father's note. She wept bitterly.

"Oh, sir, the madness of the first wrong step!" she choked out between her tears.

"It is a madness more curable than the second step: take it in hand at once, Bessie; I am willing to help you."

"Thank you, sir; but, I assure you, till this moment I've refused to see my father because I heard he only wanted to see me to disgrace me, and of course I've too much pride for that."

"There!" injected the living tempest blowing at us from the corner. "There!" The tone seemed to mean, "Are you satisfied now you've heard for yourself?" But unheeding its fury, I went on to implore the unhappy girl to go back with me.

She then said: "At any rate, sir, it's quite true that he hid out in the bush to shoot me if I went along."

"Yes, that's as true as Gospel. My maister saw him lying out by Newtown, and says he, 'Why, Munro, what be doing here this time o'day? there's no game flying now.' 'Old Nick take the game,' says he, 'I be out after that girl.'"

I recounted the story of my first interview with Munro, and Bessie again melted to tears. She seemed truly miserable, between a sense of duty and affection on the one side, and indecision and fear on the other. At last she exclaimed: "Do beg her to let me go!"

"Beg her!" She can't detain you: what claim has she on you?"

"Ay, tell him what? But I don't want you: go and see how clever it is to get back a lost character!"

"Who dares to say I've lost my character?" cried Bessie, indignantly.

"We shall see! One doesn't go into government to learn nothin', I suppose?" sneered the landlady.

"Come, come, I'm not here to listen to quarrels. Bessie, bethink yourself; will you go with me?"

"It requires resolution," she said, shrinkingly. "And for the want of that, will you be guilty of a crime?"

"Give me time, sir,—give me time," she hurriedly replied; and with that unsatisfactory result I was obliged to depart. Poor foolish young creature, she perceived not the toils thickening about her; and for one wild freak of temper was likely to incur a fearful penalty.

I called several times at the Black Bear, but without success; she was never to be seen, and I had almost given up all hope of a second interview, when one day, in returning through my former route, who should I espy but Bessie sitting on the very trunk where I had first met her father.

"You, Bessie! It looks bad to see you out this time of night."

"I am waiting for you, sir: I've never been able to find out your name, nor where you live, and as I saw you go up along, I tried to run after

you, but as I couldn't overtake you, I rested here till you came back."

"And what do you want of me, Bessie?" I spoke curtly and somewhat austere, in order to set a due value on my services and due censure on her obstinacy.

"I want you to tell them, sir, not to be uneasy after me: for there's no manner of call for it, I'm as respectable as when I left the hut."

"Bessie, you are both wilful and rebellious; do you call that respectable? If you are saved from destruction it will be in spite of yourself. What does a young woman expect if she stays out to such an hour? look, it is eight o'clock, a fair hour for England, but not for out here." I showed her my watch by the lamp-light, she glanced at it, and blushed deeply.

"Sir, I will tell you all, and you'll see I'm not so bad. I don't wish to go back to father and mother till I can repay them for the trouble I've cost 'em, and that I hope to do soon, for I'm engaged to Joe Sadlers, a successful digger; I've kept honest company with him, and he'll marry me after a bit; he's gone up the country now this very evening to see about settling near Longford, and when he comes back 'twill be so pleasant, and I shall go straight to father."

I knew enough of diggers to make me tremble for her; but to shake her faith in her betrothed was impossible. Joe Sadlers was not a digger of the common order: others might betray her, he never. We walked and talked till we reached the main road; there Bessie discovered that she had left her handkerchief at the tree. I told her it was not worth returning for, but she confessed that she had also left her lover's last letter there—and that she could not think of losing.

I could neither dissuade her from returning nor accompany her back, as urgent business bade me go forward; but she seemed to have no fear of being left, and cheerily wished me good night.

Two days afterwards, I was passing the court of justice, with a little spare time at command, and being somewhat of a hanger-on at these places, I entered to hear what might be on. I had no sooner set foot in the court, than a female voice screamed out:

"There he is! there he is! He'll tell where I was at eight o'clock on Tuesday evening;" then stretching her arms towards me, she cried, "Save me! save me, sir!"

When the commotion consequent on this outcry had ceased, it was explained to me that Bessie was apprehended on suspicion of having stolen the cash-box of the Black Bear till, which was safe at eight o'clock, and missing ten minutes after. The suspicion was the greater from the fact of the empty box having been secreted in the trunk of a tree from the direction of which she had been traced. Being duly sworn, I gave evidence, and the result was an *absti* too clearly proved for disputation. I led her from the court; and when we got free of the crowd I asked where she meant to go. She turned a bright, tearful look on me, as much as to say, can you ask; so I shook her hand, and departed; for there are scenes where a stranger should not intermeddle, and such an one I knew would take place in the

hut. But in an hour my curiosity overcame my judgment, and I found myself tapping for admittance at Munro's. He opened the door, stared at me, and then turned his head, while I entered; but we neither of us spoke. Bessie knelt by her mother, bathing her withered hand in contrite tears, and Munro commenced a desperate rattling of knives and forks, whilst his wife looked up with a face of grateful gladness. I could form no words befitting so tender a scene, so took up the Bible and read the parable of the prodigal son.

They bore it with firmness until I reached the 23rd verse: "Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive," &c.; when the father burst out:

"Us hadn't got no fatted calf; but mother's boiled her best bit of pork, and with HER here to eat it, it's a feast fit for angels."

Bessie needed not another warning that her father's roof was her safest shelter, nor did she



again leave it until a fine young husband took her home to a snug little farm in the interior. But this husband was not Joe Sadlers; of him my suspicion proved correct; he was a villain, and at the time of Bessie's marriage he was fulfilling a sentence on the roads for the robbery at the Black Bear.

OLIVE KEESE.

CHIPS'S GHOST STORY.



We were running so far south that the sailors said in jest that the skipper intended to circumnavigate the Pole. A snow-drift three feet deep often lay upon the lee side of the quarter-deck; big icicles bristled, bayonet-like, beneath the gallows and even rufled the galley; hot water had to be poured upon the blocks before the iron rod-like ropes and fast-jammed sheeves would move. Far into the morning a dull dusk continued; the day was but a twilight; the stars came out at three. An ice-watch had been set, for a huge berg, more than a mile long and some seven or eight hundred feet high, had passed us at noon in very disagreeable propinquity. The sight of that dismal Delos sullenly surging on the leaden waves—lit by a few shivering sunbeams from a patch of cold yellow in the leaden sky—had cast a chill upon our *spirits*, too. It wasn't pleasant to remember, as the brief day waned, that we might be running right on to a similar monster slowly coming up to meet us. No songs were sung that night at the little club, which a few of us had got up in the second mate's cabin. He lay smoking within his bunk, determined to be warm as long as he could, and dreading the approach of eight bells, when he would have to take the deck. We, the passengers whom he admitted to his sanctum for the sake of the entertainment, vocal and conversational, we gave him, were by no means paying our rent for the apartment, but sat on box and bench, puffing our

pipes and sipping our grog in the most solemn of silences.

"Why, I verily believe you're funky!" presently cried out the mirth-loving little officer. "If you can't sing us a song, you might spin us a yarn."

But even our anecdotal powers were frozen, and we should have spent a very Quaker-like evening, had not our host thrust aside his red curtain, and given three hearty knocks on the bulkhead which separated his "house" from that in which the carpenter and sail-maker were lodged.

"What's wanted?" was the responsive query.

"You, Chips!" the reply.

Presently the cabin-door opened; and, preceded by a blast that pierced like a plump of Cossack lances, Chips thrust his blue-brown face and snow-powdered whiskers—frosted before by age—into our little company. It was as much as he could do to shut the door again, for the wind pushed solidly against it, like a beam. At last, however, it was secured, and the carpenter, having been provided with a seat on a water-cask, and a glass of rum from a carboy of that beverage, which served as our common decanter, was told why he had been sent for.

"These gentlemen are all in the downs-to-night," said the mate, "so I want you to spin us one of your yarns to enliven us a bit."

Chips's notion of cheerful narrative must have

been singular, for—after sundry modest requests to be excused on the score that “the gen'l'm'n wouldn't care nowt for his old tales”—the following was the one he favoured us with. I will not bother the compositors and reader by attempting to preserve the old fellow's peculiar phraseology, but will give the story as I heard it as nearly as I can, without sacrificing orthography, or making any great breaches in Priscian's head, or a fool of myself by a landsman's misuse of the nautical lingo.

“In the year 'twenty-six,” said Chips, “just when I was out of my time, I took it into my head to go whaling, not as carpenter, but before the mast. I shipped on board the old —, one of Gale's of Deptford. We took in some Shetlanders at Lerwick, as whalers mostly do, as hardy chaps as any afloat; but one of them died before we'd left Ronas Head a month. He was a strange, silent fellow, that was always looking over his shoulder in the fore-castle at night, as if he expected to see something. We chaffed him about it at first, but he wasn't a safe man to plague. His mates told us all kinds of queer yarns about him; that he'd been away from the Islands for ever so long, and that nobody knew where he'd been to. All that he'd say was that he'd been in the ‘Spanish service,’ and some made out that that meant a slaver, some a pirate, some one thing, some another; but none of them any good. The Shetlanders don't mind smuggling, but they are quite a pious people in the main, and they didn't relish the way in which this man cursed and swore, and was for ever sneering at the kirk. He struck a minister one day when he'd got the horrors, and the parson had gone to look after him; saying, ‘that he didn't want any spies about his bed.’ His eyes were staring at the wall on one side of him, as if some one was standing there. They said that he had got the horrors; but, as I've told you, he had always that frightened look in the dark, even when he was quite sober. Something bad was on his mind, that's very certain.

“The day he died he was queerer than ever, keeping out of the way of everybody as much as he could, rolling his eyes about like a madman, talking to himself, and as pale as a sheet. ‘You'd better turn in, Galt,’ the doctor said to him; and down he went without a word, and presently the doctor sent him some stuff, thinking he was in a fever. My bunk was next to his, and when I turned in at eight bells I could hear him hissing through his clenched teeth, just as if he was trying to keep in a shriek. It was much such a night as this, only there was a deal more ice ranging about than what we've seen. I soon fell asleep, for we had been making-off blubber all day, and I had got quite tired over the casks. I might have been asleep about a couple of hours, when I was woken by a horrid scream—as if a soul was just dropping into the lower regions. I tumbled out in next to no time, and so did the other chaps, and we all came crowding round Galt's berth. He was squeezed up against the side (we could see, when we lifted up the lantern) as if he wanted to drive his back into the wood, and was striking out with his right hand clutched as if he'd got a knife in it, and his left with all the fingers spread out. His face was

a horrid sight. It was as white and as wet as the side of a chalk-pit, and his eyes were regularly a-light with rage and fear. I don't know which there was most of in them.

“‘Take her off! take her off!’ he yelled, when he saw us. ‘You won't! won't you, you villains! Then, confound you! go to blazes with me! I'll haunt you, and sink the ship!’

“And then his face gave a twitch like a devil trying to laugh, and he fell over on it dead, with his arms still stiff. We could hardly get them down by his sides without breaking them. The next day but one we buried him, and—you may believe me or not, as you like—but I can tell you that his body didn't drop into the sea, but was dragged down the moment he touched the water.

“The first slack day afterwards the skipper had his chest brought up, and tried to sell his things; but none of us would bid; so the skipper and the doctor, like good fellows, bid against each other, to get a good round sum for his old mother, whom he'd never cared about, his mates told us. We didn't bid, because we didn't think it would be lucky to put on anything that such a man as he had worn; but we made out a list of what each of us would give to the old girl, and gave it to the skipper to be stopped out of our pay.

“Nevertheless, after that, we had nothing but misfortunes. Next to no fish came in sight. Scarce one of those that did come, could we get near; and when we happened to strike one, the line was sure to break. One of the boats, too, went down all of a sudden, just as if it had been swallowed. Galt was haunting us sure enough. We didn't see anything of him, however, until the sun set for good. We were lying then, frozen up, in a great floe, some sixty miles N.W. of the Devil's Thumb. We could just make it out when the sun dipped—not to come up again for weeks to come. There we were, fairly shut in for the whole winter. Well, we were sawing out a dock for the ship by moonlight, when suddenly—the bears had done growling, and the wolves howling for a bit, and everything except the grating saws was still as death, for there wasn't a breath of wind blowing—all of a sudden, I say, we heard shrieks and laughing. We knocked off work, and ran aboard in a minute—we were so scared; and when we ventured to look over the bulwarks, there, about two miles off, we could see the boat's crew we had lost rushing through the mist, as big as giants, and Galt after them, even bigger, striking out just as he did when he died.

“Another time, we made out some water a mile off, with a whale floundering about in it, as if she was puzzled how to get out. We launched the boats over the ice, gave chase, and killed her, and towed her alongside the floe to flinch. We were glad enough of the crang ourselves, for we had been on short allowance for a long time. The bears and the wolves and the blue foxes scented it, and came down for their share. We drew off a bit to let them come near, and then let fly and killed a lot of them, too, for food. We had made quite a jolly pile of provisions, and were just about to spear an old shark—fried shark doesn't taste unlike fried sole, when you're hungry—that was bumping the whale with its ugly snout, to

find a tid-bit, when crack went the ice, like a monstrous big pane of glass, with a running rumble like the roar of a thousand cannon let off one after another. We could hear it growling away for miles into the darkness. The moon was just going down. The shark soon left the whale, for the bit of ice on which our prog was tilted over like a dust-cart, and shot its load into the sea. We were too busy looking after our lives to have any time to look after that. Two of our four boats were cracked like walnut-shells by the big lumps of ice that were jolting about everywhere. It was as much as ever we could do to get off our lump safely—the four crews into two boats; it danced up and down, this side and that, like a cork upon the swell. And then we had only starlight to guide us as we pulled back to the ship, with broken ice on every side threatening each moment to stave us in. I didn't see *him* that night, but three of our fellows did. They say he chased us back, jumping from block to block as if they were only stepping-stones across a brook.

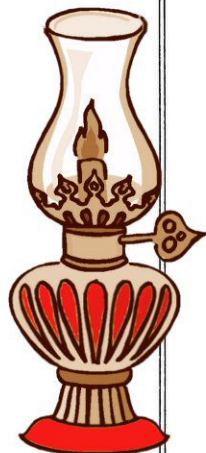
"He was seen once more big like that. The ship was frozen in hard and fast again. You could see nothing but a hummocky plain of ice, with here and there a berg sticking up like a sharp horn, for miles all round—except in one place astern, where there was a little waterhole that glimmered in the moonlight like a great watching eye. We had covered in the quarter-deck with a sloping canvas roof, but a hole was left just above the taffrail to look out from. Well, one night when the Northern Lights were flashing about the sky like huge flapping flags of red, and yellow, and green, one of the boys was looking out through this opening, and by the waterhole he saw Galt standing, as tall as a fir-tree. He had the fingers and the thumb of his left hand spread out as he had when he died, and with his right forefinger he counted them off one by one. Then down he went into the waterhole as the play-actors drop through the stage, and the next morning it was frozen up.

"On the night of the fourth day after he had been thus seen, he was seen again, the same size as he was when alive, walking round and round the ship, laughing and pointing. One, two, three, four he counted on his left hand, then shut it all up except the little finger, and kept lunging through the gloom with that. We knew what he meant next day.

"A berg twice as high as the one we saw at noon came with a jar against the floe, and shivered it for miles. The ice about the ship of course broke up and began a devil's dance, but as the bits weren't very big, and she was regularly cased with rope-fenders, she might have got over that if the berg hadn't borne down upon her as straight as if it had been steered. On it came, never once falling off a point. You may fancy what a funk we were in! We bundled clothes and blankets, pork and biscuit into the boats, and were over the side in a twinkling, pulling for dear life, and fending off the little lumps that came walloping up against us as well as we could with the boat-hooks. Two poor frost-bitten fellows couldn't leave their berths, and the skipper swore, come what might,

he'd stick by the ship. We saw him run forward and hoist the jib all by himself, to get some way on her, and then the berg came between, and we never saw any more of him or the poor old —. And may I never taste grog again if I didn't see on the berg, alongside of Galt and a foreign-looking woman, the—."

Whom he saw, and how Chips and his comrades got home, we did not hear; for just then a shrill voice from the fore-castle—echoed shrilly along the deck—sang out in tremulous haste, "Ice on the weather-bow!" and the chief officer, in his rushing route forwards, put in his snow-roofed visage at the cabin-door, and bellowed to his colleague, "Jackson, turn out!" The cabin was soon cleared, and seeing, as we did, this second monster solemnly glide past us, so near that we could plainly make out the foam of the black billows breaking on its dully glimmering sides, we may, perhaps, be excused if we gave more credence than we should have afforded in less excited moments to CHIPS'S GHOST STORY. RICHARD ROWE.



AN OLD-FASHIONED CHRISTMAS-EVE.

(FROM THE NORSE OF ASBJORNSEN.)



THE wind whistled in the leafless boughs of the old maples and limes just opposite my windows. The snow was drifting down the street, and the heavens were as dull and dark as any December sky can be in Christiania. My mind was dark and dull too. It was Christmas Eve; but it was the first Christmas Eve I had ever spent away from the domestic hearth. No long time before I had entered the army, and this Christmas I had hoped to gladden the hearts of my old parents with my presence. I had hoped, too, to show myself in all the glory of my uniform to the young ladies of the neighbourhood. But a nervous fever had brought me into the hospital, which I had only left a week, and now I found myself in that state of re-convalescence of which one hears so much praise, but which really is a very tedious matter. I had written home for our big Dapple and my father's Finnish fur cloak, in order that I might get away as soon as I could; but my letter could scarce find its way up into the Dales before the day after Christmas Day, and so the horse and the cloak could hardly get down much before New Year's Day. In the town I hadn't a comrade in whom I took any interest, or who interested himself about me; nor did I know a single family with whom I could feel at home. As for the two old maids at whose house I lodged, they were kind and good enough, and had taken great care of me

when my sickness first came on; but the manners of these ladies and their whole way of life belonged too much to the old world, and sometimes they told me, with the most ridiculous earnestness, stories, the simple, old-fashioned cut of which, as well as their many improbabilities, belonged altogether to a bygone time. In truth, there was much in common between my landladies and the house in which they dwelt. It was one of those old piles in the Custom House Street, with deep windows and long, dark passages and stairs, with gloomy rooms and lofts, where one began naturally to think of brownies and ghosts. Added to this, their circle of acquaintances was as confined as their ideas; for except a married sister, not a soul ever came to see them but one or two boring city dames. The only lively thing was a pretty niece, and a few merry romping children, nephews and nieces, to whom I was always forced to tell a string of tales about brownies and elves.

There I sat, trying to amuse myself in my loneliness, and to drive away my heavy thoughts by looking out at all the busy mortals who tramped up and down the street in sleet and wind, with rosy-blue noses and half-shut eyes. At last I began to be enchanted with the bustle and life which was the order of the day, over at the dispensary. The door was never shut an instant. Servants and countrymen streamed in and out,

and began to study the prescriptions as soon as they got out into the street again. To some few the deciphering seemed an easy task, but more often a long poring and an ominous shake of the head betokened that the problem was too hard. It got dusk, I could no longer distinguish features, but I stared over at the old building. Just as the dispensary then was, with its dark-red tiled walls, its porched gables, its weather-cocks and towers, and its leaden casements, it had stood as a monument ever since the days of Christian IV. Even the swan which was its sign then was its sign now, standing quietly with a gold ring round his neck, and riding boots on his feet, and with his wings just raised for flight. A burst of boyish laughter in a side room, and a very old-maidish tap at the door, broke off the train of thought which I was just entering into on the subject of caged birds.

As I said "Come in," the elder of my landladies, Miss Martha, came in, dropped an old-fashioned curtsy, asked how I felt, and after much circumlocution, invited me to take coffee with them that evening.

"It isn't good for you, my dear lieutenant, to sit all alone in the dark," she added. "Won't you just come and sit with us at once? Old Mrs. Skau and my brother's lassies are come already, they will amuse you, perhaps, for you know you are so fond of merry bairns."

Yes, I accepted the friendly bidding. As I stepped into the room, a pile of wood which blazed up in a great four-cornered stove, threw an unsteady glare over the apartment, which was long and deep, and furnished in the old style with high-backed chairs covered with gilt Russian leather, and one of those sofas calculated to the meridian of hoops and pigtails. The walls were adorned with portraits of stiff dames with hard features and powdered heads of city worthies, and other famous characters in buff coats and cuirasses and red gowns.

"You really must excuse us, Lieutenant A—, for not having lit the lights," said Miss Cecilia, the younger sister, who in every day life was called "Mother Cis," as she came to meet me with a curtsy own brother to her sister's; "but the bairns are so glad to tumble about before the fire in the gloaming, and Mother Skau, too, likes to have a little gossip in the chimney corner."

"Gossip me here, gossip me there. You're fond enough yourself, Mother Cis, of a bit of scandal during blindman's holiday, and yet we're to bear all the blame," answered the old asthmatic dame, whose name was Mother Skau.

"Well, well," she went on, "how d'ye do, father? Come and sit down by me, and tell me how you are going on; deary me, but you're dreadfully pulled down!" and so she chuckled over her own ailments.

So I had to tell her all about my fever, and received in return a long and detailed account of her gout and asthmatic afflictions, which by good luck was broken off by the noisy entry of the children from the kitchen, whither they had been to pay a visit to the old housekeeper and domestic calendar, 'Stina.

"Auntie, auntie!" bawled out a little, buxom,

brown-eyed thing, "do you know what 'Stina says. She says I shall go with her to-night to the hay-loft, and give the brownie his Christmas goose. But I won't go, not I, for I'm afraid of the brownie."

"Oh! 'Stina only says that to get rid of you. She daren't go to the hay-loft in the dark herself, the goose! for she knows well enough she was once scared by the brownie," said Miss Martha. "But why don't you say 'how d'ye do' to the lieutenant, bairns?"

"Oh no, no! is it you, lieutenant?"—"I didn't know you!"—"How pale you are!"—"It's so long since I saw you!"—screamed out the children, one after another, as they came round me in a troop. "Now do tell us a story—something funny; it's so long since you told us a story. Pray do tell us all about Buttercup, dear lieutenant; do tell us about Buttercup and Goldtooth." So I had to tell them about Buttercup and his dog Goldtooth, and to throw in besides a story or two about the two brownies, who drew away the hay from each other, and how they met at last, each upon his own haystack, and fought till they both flew off in a cloud of hay. I had to tell, too, of the brownie at Hesselberg, who teased the watch dog till the gudeman tossed him out at the barn-door. At this the children clapped their hands, and laughed loud and long. "Serve him right, the ugly brownie," they said, and asked for more.

"There, there, bairns," said Mother Cis, "don't tease the lieutenant any more. Now Aunt Martha will tell you a story."

"Yes, yes! do tell, Aunt Martha!" was the cry of one and all.

"I'm sure I don't know what to tell, answered Aunt Martha; "but since we've got to talk about the brownie, I'll tell you a little story about him. I daresay, bairns, you mind old Katie Gusdal, who used to come and bake bannocks, and always had so many stories to tell?"

"Oh, yes!" bawled out the children.

"Well, old Katie told us that she once lived at service in the Foundling here for many a year. It was then still more lonely and sad at that side of the town than it is now; and as for the Foundling, we all know it's a dark and gloomy house. Well, when Katie took the place she was to be cook; and a fine stout strapping lassie she was. One night, when she had to get up to brew, the rest of the servants said to her, 'Now you must mind and take care not to get up too early; before the clock strikes two you mustn't put the wort on the fire.'

"Why not?" she asked.

"You know, well enough, there's a brownie here; and you ought to know, too, he doesn't like to be roused so early; and so before the clock strikes two, you're not to think of meddling with the wort," they said.

"Stuff! nothing worse than that!" said Katie, who had a tongue and a will of her own, as they say. "I have nothing to do with the brownie; but if he comes across me, may the old gentleman take me if I don't sweep him out of the house!"

"Well, the rest warned her again, but she stuck to her own; and when the clock, might be,

was a little past one, she got up, and lighted a fire under the brewing caldron, and was busy with the wort. But every moment the fire went out under the caldron, and it was just as though some one kept throwing the brands out from the hearth, but who it was she couldn't see. So she gathered up the brands, time after time, but it was all no good, and the wort wouldn't run out of the tap either. At last she got tired of all that, so she took a burning brand, and ran about with it, swinging it about high and low, and bawling, 'Be off with you whence you came. If you think you're going to frighten me, you're quite wrong.'

"'Fie upon you, then!' she heard some one say in the darkest corner, 'I had got seven souls here in this house, and I thought I should have got the eighth as well.'

"After that Katie Gudsal said, 'No one ever heard or saw the brownie in the Foundling.'"
Here one of the little ones called out. "I'm afraid! I'm afraid! No. Lieutenant, you tell something; when you tell us a story I'm never afraid, you always tell it so funnily!"

Then another proposed that I should tell them about the brownie who danced a reel with the lassie. Now, this was an undertaking into which I was very unwilling to put my foot, because there was singing in it as well as telling; but as they wouldn't let me off, I began to hem and cough in order to get my very discordant voice ready to sing the words of the reel, when to the joy of the children, and to my rescue, in came the pretty niece I spoke of.

"Well, bairns," I said, as she took her seat, "now I'll tell you the story, if you'll only get cousin Liz to sing you the reel; for you'll all of you dance it, of course."

So the children took the pretty cousin by storm, and she had to promise to sing the words of the dance while I told the story.

"Once on a time, there was a lassie, who lived I'm sure I don't know where, but I think it was in Hallingdale, and she had to carry a syllabub to the brownie. Whether it was on a Thursday evening, or on a Christmas Eve, I can't bear in mind; but still I think it was a Christmas Eve, like this. Well! she thought it a shame to give the brownie such good food, so she gobbled up the syllabub herself both thick and thin, and then went off to the barn with some oatmeal porridge and sour milk in a pig's trough.

"'There you have your trough, ugly beast,' she said. But the words were scarce out of her mouth before the brownie came tearing at her, and took her by the waist, and began to dance with her. And he kept her at it till she fell down gasping, and then when folks came next morning to the barn, they found her more dead than alive. But so long as he danced he kept on singing"—

(Here my part was over, and Miss Liz took up the brownie's song, and sang to the tune of the Hallingdale reel:—)

Thou hast eaten up all the brownie's brose,
Now come with the brownie and try thy toes.
Thou hast robbed the brownie of his right,
And now thou must dance with brownie all night.

As the cousin sang, I kept time with my feet,

while the children with roars of mirth cut the most extraordinary capers, and executed the queerest steps between us both on the floor.

"Bairns, bairns. You turn the room topsyturvy with all this clatter," said old Mother Skau; "be quiet a bit, and I'll tell you some stories." So all were still as mice, and Mother Skau struck up:

"Old Folk tell so many stories about brownies and huldras, and such like, but, for my part, I don't put much faith in them. I'm sure, I never saw a brownie or a huldra; but, then, I haven't travelled very far in all my life, still I think all such stories stuff. But old 'Stina, out yonder, she tells how she once saw the brownie. About the time that I was confirmed, she had a place in our house, and before that she was out at service with an old captain who had given up the sea. That just was a still quiet house; they never went out and no one ever came to them, and the captain's longest walk was down to the wharf and back. They went early to bed too, and people said they had a brownie in the house.

"'But once on a time,' said 'Stina, 'the cook and I were up at night in the maid's room mending our clothes; and, when bedtime came—for the watchman had already called past ten!—darning and sowing was hard work; for every moment came Billy Winky; and so she nodded and I nodded, for we had been up early that morning to work. But all at once, as we sat there half-asleep, we heard such a dreadful clatter down in the kitchen. 'Twas just as if someone were tossing all the crockery about and throwing the plates on the floor. Up we jumped in alarm, and I screamed out, Heaven help and comfort us, it's the brownie! and I was so scared, I daren't set foot into the kitchen. As for cook she was just as much afeard; but at last she plucked up heart, and then, when she came into the kitchen, all the plates lay on the floor, but there wasn't one of them broken; and there stood the brownie in the doorway with his red cap on his head, laughing, so that it did one's heart good to see him [see p. 530]. Well, she had heard tell how sometimes the brownie could be cheated into flitting, if one only had the courage to beg him to go, and told him of a nice quiet place somewhere else; and so she had long had it in her head to play him a trick. Well, she spoke to him there and then; though to tell the truth her voice faltered a little, and bade him to flit over the way to the coppersmith, there he would find it far less noisy, for there they went to bed every night as the clock struck nine. It was true, too, she said, but you know, too, that the coppersmith was always up with all his mates and apprentices at three o'clock every morning, and kept on hammering and clattering the whole day through. After that day we saw no more of the brownie at the captain's. But he got on well at the coppersmith's in spite of all their hammering and pounding, for people said the gudewife put him a bowl of custard in the loft every Thursday evening, and so one can't wonder that they soon got rich; for the brownie helped them, and drew money to them.'

"That was what 'Stina said about the brownie," said Mother Skau, "and true it is that they pros-

pered and became well to do; but whether that was the brownie's work I'm sure I can't say."

Here the old dame began to wheeze and cough after the exertion of telling such a very long story. But when she had taken a pinch of snuff she got new life, and her tongue began to go again.

"My mother, who was a trustworthy woman, told me a story which happened here in this town, and on a Christmas Eve, too, and that I know to be true, for no false word ever came out of her mouth."

"Oh, do let us hear it, Mrs. Skau!" said I.

"Tell it! tell it, Mother Skau!" roared out the children.

The old dame coughed a little, took another pinch, and began:

"When my mother was still a girl, she used to go to see a widow whom she knew, and whose name—ah, what *was* her name—I can't remember, nor does it much matter; but she lived up in Mill Street, and was then a woman something over her best years. Well! it was on a Christmas Eve, as it might be this; and so this widow thought to herself she would go to the early service on Christmas morning, for she was a constant church-goer; and so she set out some coffee overnight, that she might have a cup of something warm before she went out in the cold. Well! she went to bed, and when she awoke the moon shone in upon the floor; and when she rose and



looked at the clock, it had stopped, and the hands stood at half-past eleven. She didn't know at all what the right time was, but she went to the window and looked out at the church, and she saw lights shining through all the windows. So she called up her maid, made her boil the coffee while she dressed, and then she took her prayer-book and went across to the church. It was still as death out in the street, and she did not meet a soul on the way. When she got inside the church, she went to the seat where she always sat; but when she looked about her, she thought all the congregation looked so pale and strange, just as though they had been all dead bodies. There was no one she knew, but there were many she thought she had seen before, only she couldn't call to mind where it was she had seen them. When the parson got into the pulpit, he was none of the parsons of the city parishes, but a tall pale man, and him too she thought she had seen somewhere. Well, he preached a beautiful sermon, and there was none of that coughing and hemming so common at the early service on Christmas morning, but all was so still she could have heard

a pin drop on the floor; so deadly still indeed, that she got quite nervous and afraid.

"Well, when they began to sing after the sermon, a woman who sat at her side, turned towards her and whispered in her ear:

"Untie your cloak, and go away; for if you wait till the service is over they'll make an end of you. *These are the dead, who are having their service.*"

"Oh, I'm afraid, I'm afraid, Mother Skau," sobbed one of the tiny ones, who crept up on a chair.

"Hush, hush, bairns!" said Mother Skau, "only listen, and you'll hear how she gets safe off."

"Well! the widow was as much afraid as you all are, for when she heard the voice and looked at the woman, she knew her at once; she had been her next door neighbour, but had been dead many a long year: and now, when she looked about the church, she remembered quite well that she had seen both the parson and many of the congregation, and that they had all been dead long ago. She grew as cold as ice, so afraid was

she, but she untied her cloak and got up to go away. But then she thought they all turned as she passed and made a clutch at her, and her legs tottered and her knees shook, so that she almost fell down flat on the floor. When she got as far as the church porch they caught hold of her cloak, but she let it slip off and left it in their hands, and hastened home as fast as she could. When she reached her own door the clock struck one, and when she got in she was well nigh dead for fright. Next morning when folk went to the church there lay her cloak on the steps of the porch, but it was torn into a thousand bits. My mother had seen it often before, and I fancy she saw one of the pieces, too; but that doesn't matter,—it was a short, bright-red cloth cloak, with hare-skin lining and edging, just such as were still worn when I was a child. Now-a-days, it is rare to see one, but there are some old women yet here in town, and at the Widows' Home, whom I see wearing just such cloaks at Christmas time."

That was Mother Skau's story. As for the children, who during the latter part of it had shown much fear and alarm, they said they wouldn't hear any more such ugly stories. They had all crept up on the chairs and sofa, and called out that some one was catching hold of their legs under the table. Just then in came lights in the old branches, and then we found out with laughter that the children, in their fright, had been sitting with their feet on the table. The bright lights, Christmas cakes, jam-tarts, and wine, soon chased away ghost-stories and fear. Finally, for the elders' rein-deer roast and rice custards, gave our thoughts a turn towards the substantial; and we took leave of one another at an early hour, with every good wish too for a merry Christmas.

How the others slept I knew not, but, for myself, I had a very restless night. I can't tell if it were the tales—the strong food which I had been so long without, my weakly state, or all three together; but I tossed about from this side to that, and was deep in brownie and huldra, and ghost-stories, the whole night.

At last I found myself flying to church through the air with a pair of dumb-bells in my hands. The church was lighted up, and when I entered it I saw it was our old church up in the Dales. There was not a soul to be seen in it but Dalesmen with red caps, soldiers in full uniform, and peasant lasses with white wimples and rosy cheeks. The parson stood in the pulpit; and who should he be but my grandfather, who died when I was a little boy. But just as he was getting well into his sermon, what does he do but throw a somersault—the always was an active body—down to the church floor, so that his gown flew one way and his hands another. "There lies the parson, and here am I," he cried, using one of his well-known expressions, "and now let's all have a dance."

In the twinkling of an eye off went the whole congregation in the wildest dance, and up came a tall stout Dalesman and took me by the shoulder, and said, "You must come along with me, my boy."

My astonishment knew no bounds as I awoke at that moment, and still felt the grasp on my

shoulder, and saw the image of my dream bending over my bed, with a Dalesman's cap drawn over his eyes, a fur cloak on his arm, and his two great clear blue eyes fixedly gazing at me.

"Thou dreamest, surely, boy," he said, in the strong dialect of my native dale, "for the sweat stands on thy brow, and thou sleepest sounder than a bear in his winter lair. But wake up now, I wish thee God's peace, and a merry Christmas from thy father and all at home. See, here is a letter from the Secretary, and here is his Finnish cloak, and yonder, down in the yard, stands Dapple."

"Oh! Thor, is it you? and how in Heaven's name, did you come hither?" I called out, gladly. It was my father's groom, a splendid specimen of a Dalesman.

"Oh! I'll soon tell thee," answered Thor. "I came driving Dapple; but before that, the Secretary and I had been to Ness, and after we had been there, he said, 'Thor, it's not far now to Christiania, so thou hadst better take Dapple, and drive in, and see the lieutenant, and if he's strong enough to travel, why, thou hadst better bring him back.' That's what the Secretary said."

As we drove merrily out of the town, the day was frosty, bright, and clear, and we had the finest sleighing. As for Dapple, he stretched out his brave old legs, and got over the ground famously. We reached home that night, and such a Christmas Day as I then spent, I spent neither before nor since. D.

THE MISTLETOE BOUGH; OR, THE ROMANCE OF THE ROSE.

WITH "sweets for the sweet" is the Christmas tree laden,

With mottoes and trinkets for youth and for maiden:

Oh, how bright are the smiles of those ladies so fair,

As they gather the fruits that are clustering there.

The firs and the laurels their branches entwine,

The glistening leaves of the green holly shine,

Its numberless berries, so brilliantly red,

Are seen all around us, while, high over head,

The delicate mistletoe trembles!—but now

Its spell is forgotten!—The mistletoe bough

No longer can call the quick flush to the face,

Its province no more is the "dangerous place."

Yet where is the change? Its green leaves are as bright,

Its form is as graceful, its berries as white,

As when held so sacred, in temples of old,

By our Druid forefathers, as I have been told;

Or witness'd the timid or boisterous kiss

Once claim'd for its sake at such seasons as this.

I have heard that young ladies are oftener now

Kiss'd under the rose than the mistletoe bough:

For the kiss is more sweet given under its shade;

More earnest and true are the vows that are made

By the rose-tree so sweet that in fancy grows,

And 'tis fair summer weather still under that rose:

These mystical roses throughout all the year

Their delicate buds and sweet blossoms uprear,

With a lovelier tint and more exquisite hue

Than yet ever in field or in garden grew:

And I'm told that young ladies would rather be now

Kiss'd under the rose than the mistletoe bough.

M. E.

other provender for his ass. In the morning the eager children find the food and provender gone, but in their place all kinds of beautiful toys. Mr. Cremer is our St. Nicholas, and does the business of the old monk without any mystery, but in an equally satisfactory manner.



HOLLYLEAF.

A STORY-TELLING PARTY.

BEING A RECITAL OF CERTAIN MISERABLE DAYS AND NIGHTS PASSED, WHEREWITH TO WARM THE HEART OF THE CHRISTMAS SEASON.

WE are six—seven would have made the announcement a poetical quotation; but one is wanting, and we remain a proxy half-dozen, not unwilling to be jolly, but waiting for the occasion.

WE are at an inn, of course. Outside it is wintry weather, and a great log fire beams on us like a cheerful president.

LAWYER Spence and Mr. Selby belong to the neighbourhood. Of the other gentlemen, one speculates in hops, and has a fine appreciation of the punch; one is of the Indian Civil Service; the last is a servant of the public of Great Britain.

HOW we came together here, would interest you but slightly. People are always flying about at Christmas, and accidents will happen. Enough that we cry out with clown, "Here we are!"

NOW Christmas is such a season for telling stories, that, I give you my word, and I am confirmed in my attestation of the fact by the after assurance of every gentleman present, we had no idea of amusing each other; we thought only of drinking our punch and toddling to bed: and to bed we should have gone, with nothing to laugh over, had not Mr. Lorrquison said suddenly:

"Ha! 'cold weather! We're comfortable here, eh? How did you spend the autumn, sir?" And that began it.

H.E.I.C.S. was addressed, and replied:

"Oh, down in Scotland."

THE conversation was relapsing; we had almost lost it; when H.E.I.C.S. appeared to remember something, and laughed.

MR. Lorrquison immediately turned a conversational side-face to him: Mr. Spence lifted his head from his glass: Mr. Selby smacked his knee: and the dealer in hops inquired what tickled his fancy.

"Nothing particular," said the Indian. "I was on the moors in a friend's hut, and was only laughing at a miserable night I passed there."

A DREADFUL NIGHT IN A HUT ON THE MOORS.

HE paused, as if to hint there was really nothing remarkable in his experience, and pursued:

"My friend hires a shepherd's hut for the shooting season. The shepherd's wife is his cook, and does the work in primitive fashion. You shoot a blackcock—it's presented to you boiled, a pheasant—boiled! everything's boiled! I believe she would boil a boar's head. I suffered a little, of course, but that was nothing. She made tolerable hare soup. The animal is skinned, and then stewed down—blood, entrails, and all. I once brought her a hare: she rejected it with scorn: there wasn't 'bluid enoo.' Well, we shot some game—blackcock rather plentiful this season—tried our hands at spearing salmon, and sought what amusement we could find among a scanty but lively population. One night my friend, who had established relations with some neighbouring Scotch—I suppose I must say farmers—invited them to dine with him; and as these gentry have to come some distance over the hills, an invitation of this sort involves the offer of a bed, or, at least, some place for them to stretch their limbs. I forget how many glasses of whiskey-toddy I consumed in their society. I was the first to move to bed; but my departure did not at all disturb them. In my first sleep I was aroused by the sound of a heavy fall on the floor. I rose in bed. My friend was at my feet, trying to open the window. 'Only one of the Scotchies,' he said, and informed me that it was impossible to quarter him down stairs, as the door would not shut, and the wind blew cold.

"There he is," he added, laughing "toddily," if I may be allowed the word. 'He said when he last spoke, that he preferred a good floor to a bed. You'll find him strong; so I open the windows.'

"Complaint was of no use, so I lay down again: my friend went off to his Scotchie, and all seemed at peace. By and bye I felt the cold, and decided to rise quietly and exclude the wind. I had one foot out of bed, when a low growl surprised me, and made me draw it in again quickly. Looking over on one side, I perceived a dog. I have no doubt he was of the ordinary size of shepherds' dogs in general, but to me he appeared enormous. He had evidently come to watch over his master, and was determined to tear the leg of any one moving in the room. I thought it better to try and bear the cold than come to a tussle with him, and rouse the savage nature of the beast. There's something in presenting a naked leg to a dog, which is, I assure you, not pleasant. But the cold increased. I got out of bed. He growled a moment, and then up he jumped and made a rush

at me. I'm not ashamed to confess that I was beforehand with him, and sought ignominious shelter in the sheets. He growled again, and I heard him trot round to his original position at the feet of his master. My case seems ridiculous, but it was really desperate. The wind was blowing dead on me, and what with my Indian constitution and the draughts, I saw myself clearly in for a long course of ills. But it was a full hour before I could resolve what to do: a most miserable hour, I can assure you. I jumped out of bed with all the bed-coverings in my hand—met the savage beast as he was about to spring, and buried him under them. I had just time to shut the window—I was hurrying back to my bed, when I saw his tail emerge, and there was nothing for it but to return to bed as rapidly as I could, and leave him the sheets and blankets. There I remained, as cold as ever, while he took his station on them. There never was such a dog in the manger! If I got hold of the end of a blanket and began to pull, he growled and made a dash at my hand. The very movement of my leg caused him to be up and alert for an encounter. Once I pulled with all my might, and the beast seized

the blanket between his teeth and pulled against me. I became enraged. I thought of my original stratagem; and leaping out again, I flung the blanket—or what portion of it was in my possession—straight at him. But this time I was not so successful. I only contrived to blind his eye for a moment—the next we were rolling together over the recumbent Scotchman.

“‘Hech! is it the deil?’ I heard him say; and he grasped my foot.

“I lashed out, and sent him roaring backward. Presently he and I were engaged, and burst through the door in our struggle, without much difficulty, right on to the body of my friend's Scotchman, extended in the manner of his comrade. He uttered a similar inquiry about the deil! and forthwith joined in the fray. My friend was not long in adding a fourth to this curious nocturnal engagement, the dog all the while barking furiously, and snapping at every leg but his master's. This lasted, I should think, about twenty minutes, at the shortest calculation, when the shepherd and his wife appeared with lights, and I hope they were gratified. But their arrival gave rise to the second case of dead-lock on



record. None of us would move till the dog was secured. I held my Scotchman firmly; my friend held me; his Scotchman held mine; and mine had got hold of my friend—being tenacious of his quarry, I suppose, for he had nothing to fear; and so we continued till the dog was secured. It

was then close upon morning. We all went down stairs, and drank in the day. Nothing extraordinary, you see, but something to laugh at.”

This unlocked us.

“I think I'll take a little more of your punch, sir,” said Mr. Selby to Mr. Lorquison.

Mr. Lorquison filled Mr. Selby's glass, and then rubbed his hands, as one who has suddenly the prospect of a good social evening before him.

A PARALLEL NIGHT IN A BED.

"Yes," continued Mr. Selby. "This didn't happen to me, mind! But talking about miserable nights, reminds me of a case. There was a fellow on my uncle's estate—you know it, Spence—at Benlea. I made friends with him when I was a boy, and such a fellow I think I never met. He was a daring fellow, a determined poacher—in short, a good-for-nothing;—what your Scotch

friends, sir, would call a 'ne'er-do-weel:' and he went to the 'deil' as fast as he could. His name was Tom Clayper. We called him Tom Claypipe, because he always had one in his mouth. Well, the fellow took a fancy to me, and taught me some tricks, which I hope I have forgotten. When we're young we're not very choice in our friendships. But Tom really had some good points. I have known him send a hare secretly to a poor widow, who wanted a bit of something. The hare, you say, cost him little. Perhaps he did not reckon how much it did cost him. However, from poaching to highway robbery, and from



that to burglary, was but a step for Tom. He found Benlea too hot for him, and disappeared. I met him ten years afterwards. Looking in the paper one day, I saw there was a trial of one with many aliases, for feloniously entering a certain house—Squire Pell's, of Boddington—and stealing, &c., &c. Among the list of aliases stood the name of Clayper. He was condemned, and sentenced to transportation for the term of his natural life.

"The sight of the poor fellow's name, and his position, called up some boyish feelings of mine, and I made up my mind to go and see him. I was able to procure admission. Tom recognised me at once, and held out his hand. He was never ashamed of himself; which was one characteristic he had. We talked over old times. I was capable of appreciating what merits Mr. Clayper possessed, now that I had seen more of the world, and he was certainly an extraordinary fellow. As I was still young enough to be pleased at hearing adventures; and as Tom, now that his career seemed closed, was gratified in relating his, I had Tom's history before we parted. Its finale seems

to have been this: for Tom was rather shy of speaking about certain matters—a peculiarity I have noticed in some of your rips. He had his feelings of delicacy where women are concerned. A rather pretty girl was in service at the Squire's—Squire Pell, I think I told you. To her Tom paid court. He was richer in presents than in reputation. I fancy the girl gave him reason to think she liked him. At all events she did not return his fineries. One evening, Mr. Tom met the Colonel in her company—somewhere about the grounds. Tom assured me that he passed them civilly; but the next time he came across the Colonel he was surly, and managed to insult him, and then to speak his mind, which was none of the cleanest. The Colonel, you must know, was engaged at the time to be married to Squire Pell's only daughter—money, but no beauty. So he let Tom get the best of him; but from that day, Tom says, he felt he had an enemy, and knew who that enemy was. 'Wasn't he a coward to hunt a poor devil like that in the dark?' said Tom to me, and declared he knew the Colonel was a coward, and was determined to be revenged, and satisfied of it.

"One night the Colonel was in bed, and heard his door yield its lock, and open.

"You shall hear the rest in Tom's words:—

"I knew that man was a coward, sir; so once in the house, and sure of his room, I knew I had him. I knew the bearings of the bed. I watched how the light fell two or three nights before. The moment I opened the door, I threw the light—carried a dark lantern—threw the light slap on his face. I saw him start. Did that man open his eyes? Deuce a bit! Slept as sound as penance. I laughed to myself. Why, if he had got up, it'd have been a fair struggle between us, and nabbed I certainly should 'a been. But deuce a bit did he stir. Colonel Badger, thinks I, I'll badger you! Well, I walked slow up to him, with the lantern in one hand, and my pistol in the other, levelled at his head. There was he sleeping harder and harder. I couldn't quite see his heart beat, but I'll lay my life it galloped."

"I will spare you Tom's oaths.

"Well sir, he went on. 'I'd half a mind at one moment, to do for him outright. For a coward who's nothing better than a villain, what good's he for, to live? Close down to his forehead I put the muzzle of the pistol. It was tempting then. Just a hair, and he'd have had an extinguisher on his small candle! Lor, sir, his eyes was shut, but I'll wager he saw it all as clear as day. And there was the perspiration a burstin' out of his forehead, and rollin' down his cheeks. I remember a large drop of perspiration on his nose! And he pretendin' to sleep hard all the while! Why, the stoopid ass! did he think I didn't know that a chap *never* sweated in his sleep! Leastways not natural sweat. Well! I kept at that, drawing the pistol away, and puttin' of it close, for, I should think, forty minutes or more; but I took no account. I was cruel glad, to be sure, and he perspiring harder and harder. Not a move right or left. I didn't speak. I thought to myself, 'Oh you villain! I dare say you think yourself better than me, don't you? And if you had me in your power, now, wouldn't you let loose? But I ain't such a coward as you! You shall bleed, my fine chap—in the pocket. That'll do!' For, said Tom to me. I hadn't come there and run the risk, only to frighten the Colonel. Two birds at one blow was always my game. So by-and-bye, Tom pursued, 'when I thought I'd given my gentleman a pretty good sweat for the benefit of his health, I began to ransack. I knew the whereabouts of his desk, and things—collared the desk entire, and made as if I'd walk away. He had a chance then. The cowardly beast! There he stuck. He'd have liked to snore, just to persuade me he was a snoozin'! And such a fellow as that to go misleadin' of young women! Ain't it disgustin', sir?'

"Tom was a bit of a moralist, you see.

"Well, the end of it was that Tom, after giving the Colonel another dose, made up his mind to quit the premises. 'And I went, sir,' said Tom. 'Got off scot free. I just spoke these words in a solemn voice. Colonel; whether you're asleep, or whether you're awake, just you keep quiet the next quarter of an hour, or you're a dead man. I ain't going yet, but my comrades is (I was all

alone, sir, I never took a pal, if I could help it; but I thought I'd tell him so, the coward!) and I'll stop outside the door, I says, till they're safe. So mind your eye, I says. I'm in earnest. And then I touched his forehead with the cold iron and moved back, pointin' at him still, and his face shinin' with the cold sweat. He won't forget that hour I give him, in a hurry. I knew very well he'd sleep on, bless you, and so he did, and I never heard nothin' till a month ago, when they pounced on me for it, and here I am, goin' to see foreign lands, thanks to you, Colonel. But you won't forget me, so don't try. And everybody's talking of the story, for I outs with it at the trial neck and crop. I told it all about his sweatin' and pretendin' to sleep. I saw the people laugh. I'll swear the judge enjoyed it, for all he looked that grave you'd think he was a owl. Ha! ha! Mr. Colonel! that's what I calls strikin' as you fly. They'll call you a coward in Old England; but they won't call me one in Van Diemen."

"And with this consolation Mr. Tom Clayper departed on his voyage. You will admit, gentlemen, that the Colonel's night must have been sufficiently miserable."

We all agreed that we did not envy the Colonel his position. Mr. Spence approved his conduct. The dealer in hops sided with Mr. Tom Clayper. Mr. Lorrison thought he should have given the alarm when the audacious burglar left the room. The H.E.I.C.S. was of opinion that Tom's judgment on the Colonel was well grounded, and I took the side of those who have not been tried as the Colonel was.

Mr. Spence coughed—"Ahem!"

This, when stories are beginning to flow, is always taken for a sign of one coming in sequence. We were not disappointed.

A MOST EXCITING DRAMA.

"Well, gentlemen," he commenced, without any *à propos*, "you've given me some amusement, I'll do my best in return. My story's professional. You won't object to that? In the law we hear and come across queer things. I give you warning I had nothing to do with this in question; but my agents in London—a highly respectable firm—were engaged in the inquiry. It was all in the papers some years ago, but I dare say you have forgotten it. And, after all, a story twice told may pass on a winter's night."

We applauded the observation, and bade him proceed.

"I'll make it short," said Mr. Spence. "It's a drama in three acts—there's blood in it; but don't be alarmed, I beg.

"Act the First, then. I was fond of the play when I was a young man, articulated in London. The scene opens in a dentist's room in the West-End of London. Mr. Filey was a fashionable dentist, with an exceedingly, what is called, gentlemanly appearance. You might have taken him for a baronet, and so might I. A carriage drove up to the house, and a lady carefully attired—West-End costume, and some of those women do look very captivating. I haven't been in London now for four years, notwithstanding the railways; and when I do go it's never to the

West-End. But, well,—a lady, I said. She inquired for Mr. Filey. That gentleman made his bow.

"'Mr. Filey,' she said, 'I have come to you on a sad case.' She sighed. Of course Mr. Filey was full of sympathy—in his aspect, at all events.

"'Yes,' she said, 'it is very sad. You are great in teeth, Mr. Filey. Do you remember me years ago?'

"Mr. Filey begged to be excused his forgetfulness, attributing it to his extended practice.

"'Ah! I was then younger, Mr. Filey. I am now, as my card will have shown you, Lady Spriggs.'

"Mr. Filey bowed to the title.

"'I have a nephew, Mr. Filey; the heir to a vast property. He has but one defect—his teeth! Oh! the trouble those teeth have given us! His timidity is such that he will never now approach a dentist's shop—I mean house, and we are at our wit's ends what to do with him. Do you think that if I contrived to lure him here, Mr. Filey, that you could so manage as to remove one or two of his—I think you call them grinders—without his being aware of it?'

"The proposition was rather startling, but Mr. Filey was an old hand, and an able.

"He said, he had no doubt that, if he had the young gentleman there, he would extract the teeth, and he should hardly know anything of it—so delicate and sudden would be the manipulation—till it was over.

"'That will do,' said the lady. 'You will eternally oblige his family, Mr. Filey, and deeply shall I feel indebted to you, believe me. I will take the liberty of paying you in advance, if you please. May I know what it will be?'

"She drew forth her purse, and paid the sum Mr. Filey thought fit to demand.

"Arrangements were then made that the young gentleman should call on the morrow, at two o'clock P.M., precisely. Every device not to alarm his sensitiveness in the matter of his teeth was promised by Mr. Filey, who was forewarned that the young gentleman was eccentric, and dressed not quite in the fashion—in fact, commonly; so that, unless you knew it, you would not presume him to be heir to a vast estate.

"The scene closes on Mr. Filey bowing the lady into her carriage.

"Act the Second, displays a jeweller's shop. West End. Messrs. Spitchcock and Co. A lady alights from her carriage, and enters. She desires to see some jewellery. A diadem set with diamonds fixes her eye. Her taste is pleased by a beautiful bracelet, and a pair of ruby ear-rings which suit her complexion, she thinks. She is assured that they suit her admirably. She hands her card:—Lady Spriggs; at present residing at Mr. Filey's.

"'You know Mr. Filey, the dentist?'

"'Very well, indeed,' she is told, 'and Sir Sampson also, by name.'

"She then desires them to make out their bill, and tell her the amount of her purchases. Four hundred odd pounds the bill amounted to. And the shopman wasn't astonished! But what a country this is, where women can lavish money on gimcracks—as I tell my wife. However! the

lady said she would be infinitely obliged to them, if, within half an hour—that was, by two o'clock, precisely, and not a moment later—they would pack up the things, and despatch them and the bill, by one of their young men, to Mr. Filey's, where Sir Sampson, her husband, would write out a cheque, and liquidate the debt. Some woman's rigmarole, I suppose. However! the request was readily assented to. She departed, and the scene closes with her being bowed into her carriage a second time. May the Lord have mercy on simpletons!

"Well, gentlemen, Act the Third. I contend that they are perfect acts, though they have but a scene a-piece.

"A young man with parcel calls at two o'clock, precisely, that afternoon, at Mr. Filey's, and asks to see Sir Sampson Spriggs.

"'Her ladyship is within,' says the page.

"The young man says, she will do. He is ushered into a room where he sees the lady.

"Do you smell a rat, gentlemen?

"Well, the lady affably took the parcel from the young man, and said:

"'I will take it to show my husband up-stairs. He will be with you in five minutes, and hand you the cheque. You will excuse me? I must first satisfy him of the necessity I have for the articles.'

"Of course, the poor fellow thought that all was fair and straightforward. Ha! ha! He said, he would be happy to wait. Ha! ha! He took a chair. Ha! ha! ha!'

Mr. Spence lost himself in a fit of laughter. Just divining the catastrophe, we also laughed a laugh of eager expectation.

"Don't you see it?" cried Mr. Spence. "But it's really too bad to laugh. Well. He waited. The minute hands of the clock went round. He waited on. Before he had time to feel uncomfortable in his mind, the door opened, and a gentleman walked in who bowed to him, and made his mind quite easy.

"'I brought the things,' said the young man; 'and am waiting—'

"'To see me,' said Mr. Filey, admiring the stratagem of the lady immensely. 'To see me. Yes. I'm aware. A beautiful day to-day, sir? Rather sultry. May I offer you a glass of wine?'

"Of course the young man didn't object. Ha! ha! You know how they used to prepare victims for the sacrifice! Ha! ha!

"Well. They talked. Mr. Filey said:

"'Pray take a chair, may I ask you?' and the young fellow, warmed by his wine, was quite agreeable to anything.

"'Will you open your mouth, may I ask?' said Mr. Filey.

"'What for?' says the young fellow, amazed.

"'Oh, nothing!' says Mr. Filey. 'I merely wished to inspect. The conformation of your tongue struck me as peculiar. Not that it affects your speech, sir. Not at all. But pray allow me.'

"The poor young fellow opened his mouth. Ha, ha! He opened his mouth, and gaped.

"'Now draw back your tongue,' said Mr. Filey.

"No doubt the young fellow thought him a very eccentric baronet, but he complied.

"In a minute one of his grinders was seized—caught in a vice, wrenched, twisted, pulled. Heaven spare us all the horrible agony! I can't laugh any more. The grinder came out at last, in the midst of stifled screams, and I'm afraid, curses. It came out, and the young man was guilty of an assault on the body of the dexterous operator. Mr. Filey went down.

"Where's the lady? Where's Sir Sampson Spriggs?" roars the young man, with his hand on his mouth.

"My dear sir," says Mr. Filey. "You really—you may be eccentric; but when one is doing you a good, sir—doing you a service—"

"Service," splutters the wretched young fellow. "Service to pull out a tooth when I didn't ask you!"

"Ask me, sir," says Mr. Filey. "When I tell you it has been arranged by your estimable aunt, Lady Spriggs, and that it was paid for yesterday—"

"Paid for yesterday!" bawls the victim, starting back.

"This tooth, sir, was paid for yesterday," says Mr. Filey, impressively.

"Lady Spriggs—my aunt?" exclaimed the confounded youth.

"Come, sir," says Mr. Filey. "I think whatever your objection to part with it, you owe me an apology. I will not say, in due form. I expected caprice. But really such violence!"

"The young man deliberately asked for Sir Sampson Spriggs, or the parcel of jewels which he had brought half an hour ago from the shop of Messrs. Spitchcock and Co., whose servant he distinctly proclaimed himself to be.

"Bless me!" cried Mr. Filey, "is there some mistake! Have I really?—on my honour, I—"

"If you will go up to Sir Sampson Spriggs, and get that parcel of jewellery immediately—" said the young man.

"Mr. Filey started.

"I won't prosecute you," the young man added, washing his mouth out with water.

"You are not the nephew of Sir Sampson?" said Mr. Filey.

"Don't laugh at a chap, after what you've done to him," growled the young man.

"There's a mistake," said Mr. Filey. "Sir Sampson is not here. It was an innocent stratagem—"

"Innocent?" sneers the young man.

"To get you to submit to the operation—Lady Spriggs—"

"Will you ring for her, or not?" cries the no longer unsuspecting youth.

"The bell was rung. The ready page informed them that Lady Spriggs had left the house shortly after her brief interview with the young man. By degrees the consummate confidence of Mr. Filey in her ladyship was melted and dispersed. He accompanied the young man to Messrs. Spitchcock's, relates his share in the adventure, and made, let us hope, something like due reparation to the poor victim of the cleverest piece of rascality I know of. The rest was in the hands of the police and my agents in London.

"At any rate—you talk of miserable nights—I

think you'll allow, gentlemen, that there was a miserable day for any poor fellow under the sun."

On the whole, we certainly thought that this young fellow was worse off than the Colonel.

"If comparisons were in good taste," said Mr. Lorrison, "I should request permission to observe, that your day is more horrible than any night I ever heard of. To lose a tooth for nothing, egad! Allow me to fill your glass, sir. Bottom of the bowl, by George! How say you, gentlemen?"

Oh, decidedly! we answer: a fresh bowl! During the brew we conversed. Mr. Selby tried us with a ghost. But there was no belief to be had in it, though the wind did blow, and it was Christmas. The dealer in hops laughed outright, and struck his gaiters at the real climax of the phantom. This gentleman had evidently something on his mind.

"Talking of miserable days," said I, as I held my glass to be replenished by Mr. Lorrison's second great triumph in the business of punch-brewing; "talking of miserable days, a friend of mine passed one in a railway carriage, which is, I think, almost unsurpassed."

"Out with it! Let's hear it!" cried the company, settling in semi-circle round the fire, glass in hand.

A TERRIBLE DAY IN A RAILWAY CARRIAGE.

"But first, to appreciate the incident," I began, "you must know my friend. He is the most bashful of men, and he stutters: under the influence of excitement, he can hardly speak. Afflicted by a sense of shame, he would fain be dead and buried. To such men life may be a daily tragedy. My friend also is liable to misfortune; so that, with a light heart, and a great capacity for enjoyment, he is usually as miserable as any Manichæan would desire. I seldom meet him but he has some dire calamity to communicate to me. And, as if by fatality, it is of a kind that reddens the cheeks of a bashful man. I might tell you many extraordinary adventures that have befallen him. This was his last.

"My friend, you must know—we will call him Harry Saxon—is a very amiable amateur-cricketer, out of his bank. He will take the train at six o'clock in the morning to be down a hundred miles north or west, to a match. On the occasion which led him to his disaster, he had journeyed down north and played his game with success and satisfaction. But the next morning he had to be up in town in time for the first official hour at his bank, so he made short work of it over-night, and escaped to bed at half-past one A.M.; breakfasted hastily at half-past five, and hurried to the station as quick as he could, arriving there twenty minutes too early, which cooled him; so much so that, when he entered the carriage, he bethought him that he had on his light cricketer-trousers, and might as well—since he had a warm pair, and was alone in the carriage—change them and comfort his limbs. He remembered also that he could not appear at his bank in light flannels. I hope no one will see any harm in that resolve. If the

British public should suggest that there were modest cows in the pastures he was flying by, and young corruptible heifers, I have only to remark that Mr. Saxon was much above their level. As it was day, moreover, he could not offend the moon. Of course I share the popular belief that we were born in trousers, and never get out of them. I would merely observe that the case of Mr. Saxon was an exception to the rigid rule. Besides, since he was only relinquishing one pair to assume another, the offence, however grievous, was but momentary, you will admit. Had he done all the honours to the renowned modesty of this island, he would have drawn the second pair over the first. I can only excuse his not doing this by the declaration that he did not think of it, and absolutely saw no harm in what he was doing. So far then we will exonerate him. Unfortunately the thought of a change had not struck him till he had shot ahead some miles. And, again, very unfortunately, as we say when he would cite instances clearly fated, the young gentleman took off his tight flannels before he opened his carpet-bag to disengage his thick tweeds. Mr. Saxon is of somewhat hasty temperament, slow to conceive—quick to execute; a fine quality which occasionally leads to trouble; for while he was unstrapping his bag the train insensibly slackened speed, and suddenly stopped. On perceiving this alarming fact, Mr. Saxon pulled at the straps with tremendous vigour a second or so, and then looked out of the window with a face outwardly as composed as any ordinary traveller with no burden on his mind and with clothing to his legs, may wear. What the feelings of a bashful man so placed, must have been, I need not tell you. Analysis, if we wished to defend him before a jury of pruders, might be justifiable; but you will not require it. Mr. Saxon's heart gave a bound. There was a lady addressing the guard, who pointed down in the direction of Mr. Saxon's head, and led her swiftly on. Mr. Saxon made a final effort to array himself in one or the other pair, gave it despairingly up, and thought it best to block the window and look extremely uninviting. He could not believe that his fortune could be so cruel as to send this lady straight to him at a time when, without wishing to be un-courteous, he profoundly devoted her to Jericho. He was forgetful of his experience. Some men have a great hoard of experience, and only see it by the lurid light of new distresses. Now, Mr. Saxon should, no doubt, have spoken and warned the lady off. He stuttered,—I have told you. He did speak, but he was unintelligible. The guard wrenched at the door. Mr. Saxon had just time to hide his nether-failings under a railway-rug, which he had providentially with him, when the door opened and the lady became his companion. The train whistled blithely, and off they went.

"Now my friend Harry Saxon tells me he considers it a curious thing that the lady, after a little while, began to regard him with something like astonishment. But the fact does not surprise me, who know him. Nervousness is a part of bashfulness; and, affected by nervousness, we are apt, without knowing it, to grimace strangely. To

speak metaphysically, and with enlightened obscurity, we think of ourselves to such an excess, that we grow oblivious of our actions. I dare say you all understand.

"M—adam!" said Harry, after several impotent efforts.

"The lady replied, 'Sir,' or 'Yes.' He chronicles it exactly, but I forget.

"Ha . . . ha—are you going the whole way to T . . . Town?" said Harry, gasping and holding on his rug with both hands.

"No, sir," said the lady, haughtily, coldly, and shortly.

"What a blessing!" thought Harry, sinking back.

"The lady opened a book.

"At the next station, Harry looked at her imploringly. She would not go. Perhaps, thought Harry, she's going on to the last station but one! There he was sure the carriage would be filled.

"He begged politely of her to tell him when she intended to quit the train.

"Really!" said the lady. "May I inquire, sir, why you are so anxious to know?"

"Not at all," said Harry, speaking as enigmatically as he looked.

"The lady resumed her reading. An old gentleman, with two young ladies, now entered the carriage. Harry tightened and compressed the rug, and sat glaring at them.

"At all events," thought Harry, "they can't make me move." This consolatory notion had hardly whispered its barren comfort to him, when a slight shock was felt. He saved himself from going into the old gentleman's arms. Happily, the ladies were too much alarmed to notice his excessive discomposure.

"What's the matter?" said the old gentleman.

"The train had come to a stand.

"Oh! what is it?" cried all the ladies.

"Stop a minute, my dears," said the old gentleman. "Don't be alarmed. Perhaps one of us had better get out and speak to the guard."

"Oh, papa, you shall not go!" exclaimed the young ladies: and the one who was alone exclaimed,

"Perhaps we shall be safer out than in."

"The young ladies reiterated that their papa should not go. A common eye was directed to Harry, who sat, with a fiery face, trying to appear perfectly unconscious.

"Well, if I mayn't go," said the old gentleman, "perhaps this gentleman will?"

"Here was a direct appeal. Harry pretended not to hear.

"Oh! it must be something dreadful!" cried the ladies.

"Will you oblige us, sir?" said the solitary lady, "by getting out and speaking to the guard?"

"She addressed poor Harry.

"Mr. Saxon grimaced horribly. 'I should be h . . . happy,' he began.

"Just ask him if there's any apprehension of danger," said the old gentleman, thinking that he spoke in the assenting tense.

"I k . . . I k . . . can't!" says Harry.

"The ladies regarded him with wonder. All

Harry's hopes were that they would get out, and leave him. Danger, ruin, dreadful smashes, he was indifferent to: anything was better than his present torment.

"Can't speak, sir?" said the old gentleman.

"Can't m - - move," says Harry.

"No legs—eh? Dear me!" the old gentleman observed. And yet the rug displayed a pair in outline. "Paralysis—lower limbs? Dear me!"

"Several people were out of the train by this time. The old gentleman and all the ladies got out, too. Word was passed that there was a general order to evacuate the carriages.

"Harry heard the old gentleman say. 'We mustn't leave that poor fellow. We must help him out.'

"Meantime he was at his carpet bag again. One clear minute to himself, and Harry would be a man. He cared not to risk his life for one clear minute to himself. Before a quarter of the time had expired, and while the garments dangled unfilled, the old gentleman opened the door, and informed Harry that he was prepared to help him out. There also stood the ladies, looking most charitably.

"Do p— please shut the door," cried Harry.

"Come, sir," said the old gentleman, 'you must come out. Give me your arm.'

"I k— can't, I tell you," says Harry.

"But I will help you, sir," said the old gentleman.

"I won't!" says Harry.

"You must be mad, sir, you must be stark mad," said the old gentleman.

"Pushed to extremity, Harry answered. 'So I am.'

"Then you must be dragged out, sir, dragged out by force, main force, sir. Guard!" shouted the old gentleman.

"The guard came up, but only to say it was a false alarm. The train had shaken off one of the carriages, and turned a few sheep into mutton—all was right now, and everybody was to step in.

"Off they went once more.

"It is really cruel to dwell on Mr. Saxon's miseries, and the incidents which were perpetually aggravating them and driving him to frenzies of distraction. At one place a lady entered, who could not ride with her back to the engine. He was positively—being the only gentleman facing it—asked to favour her by changing seats; and, gallant by nature, courteous, obliging, he had to stutter a downright refusal. But realise his position, and I think you will admit that, for a bashful man, Mr. Harry Saxon endured four hours of mortal misery that it would be hard to match. Excessive civilisation, you see, has its troubles. It may seem rather unkind to leave him in the state I have left him in. I will justify this artistic stroke, by assuring you that Mr. Saxon is, I have no doubt whatever, at the moment I speak to you, perfectly prepared to make his bow in the most exquisite society."

The gentlemen discussed what might have happened to Mr. Saxon.

"For a bashful man," said Mr. Lorquison,

"that certainly was about as unfortunate a dilemma as I remember to have heard of."

Mr. Spence conceived that he should have made a confidante of the first lady, remarking that women, in such cases, when appealed to, are, as a body, considerate, and not wanting in gentle excuses.

"That's what I should have done," said Mr. Spence. "She would have looked out of the other window, and all would have been over in a trice."

The H.E.I.C.S. thought so too; and cited the indifference of ladies in India to those garments.

Mr. Lorquison excused himself from any recital, seeing that he knew not one. But the punch was a performance far excelling our flimsy efforts to amuse: and I only wish every good man and true may drink as good this Christmas season. R.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS.

A BEETLE came out of its hiding-place and looked at him. A spider crawled up his leg and examined it; but he did not move. He sat alone in his lodging, a dark, sombre man. In the room beneath there were sounds of merriment, and he had caught, as he mounted the stairs, the flutter of dresses in the hall; and a murmur of children's voices and laughter had reached him; so he shut the door close that he might hear nothing.

On the table stood a tray with an isolated cup and saucer and a teapot, and a little kettle on the hob kept bursting into wheezy snatches of song to remind him that it was there waiting. But the dark man's head leaned on his hands, his hands on his knees, and his great black shadow darkened the wall behind. The little spirits that had been hurrying to and fro amongst the red coals came out and looked at him, but he never stirred. They perched upon his chair and upon his knee; they gathered in solemn conclave on the hearth-rug.

"There was a Christmas fire not so long ago," began a little spirit, nodding solemnly at the kettle, "very different from this. We were there, for we are the spirits of the Christmas fires. How it leaped and crackled in the grate, and sent out a jolly red-hot glow all round the room! How it shone out on wreaths of evergreens, and its frolicking lights kissed the red berries on the walls! And little feet daintily shod came in upon the oak floor; bright faces laughed back at the jolly old fire, and there was sweet music and dancing and merriment. *He* was there, and he had singled out his partner from amongst the merry ones. Close at her side he kept, through the dance, the song, and the game, and though her pretty head was bent a little, and her merriment quieter than the rest, she seemed to like it too. There was a world of happiness, half fearful half trusting, in her young face, as beautiful as it was gentle.

"But when the music was heard no longer, and the dainty shoes had ceased to dance upon the oak floor; when the jolly fire had sunk a little lower—nothing to be compared with that bit of rubbish though—he led his partner back from the

doorway, timidly. There were sounds of supper in a distant room; but they wanted no supper, these two; they stood alone by the friendly fire, and the gentle one trembled a little, with a flush on her cheek deeper, perhaps, than fire or dancing could call up. But he—that dark, sombre man—held her hand in his, and he put on her finger, tenderly, a glistening ring. We were there, we saw it, and we wished them ‘A Merry Christmas!’”

Then all the little spirits clapped their hands and chorussed out “A Merry Christmas!”

Then there was a mourning sound amongst the little spirits, and another took up the tale.

“There was a Christmas fire not so long ago,” he began, sorrowfully, “which shone upon the same oak floor, and lighted up wreaths of the same evergreens, and there had been merriment, but it was hushed. No light footstep trod the floor, no gentle one stood by the friendly fire, but other sounds were heard.

“He was there then, passion on his face, and rage in his clenched fist, and opposite to him—white and angry, too—his only brother.

“‘You have dared,’ cried out the dark man; ‘you have dared to put your miserable foot across my path—to take away that which was dearer to me than life—to steal from me that which was mine faithfully once—’

“The pale brother’s head was bent, but his words were bitter.

“‘You kept your secret close. I knew nothing. I dared to love. What sin was there in that?’

“‘Puny coward! In my father’s house you were ever the favourite. When we were children, my very tongue was not my own. Did any dispute arise—I must give up my will to you, the youngest, because, forsooth, you were weakly. When I left that home, because I could no longer bear the constant bickering you and your tender sister raised between us, you triumphed. I, the eldest, gave up my birthright and turned out into the world for you. Is the sacrifice never complete? Am I to give up to you my heart’s blood—the love of my life? Shall I grovel before you now, and bid you take her and be happy, holding forth the right hand of brotherhood? So help me all the passions of my nature—no! Across my father’s threshold my foot shall pass never again. I look upon your face no more.’

“‘Be it so. Before I go from your presence for ever, hear me confess that mine alone is the folly, mine the love. Hear me say, that never, by word or action, has she broken her plighted truth to you. Me you have always distrusted—let your vengeance end there.’

“But in that dark man’s heart there burnt a flame harder to quench than the hottest fire, and the fuel which fed it was jealousy, distrust, and wrath. When the little figure once so joyous stood before him sorrowful; when she lifted her troubled face wistfully, and prayed him to say what she had done, why did he not listen? Should he not have remembered how they stood there alone on that other Christmas night, and the words that were spoken then? Ah! he did remember, and the thought of that great happiness lost to him for ever—for he did not

believe her—lent strength to his jealous anger and bitterness to his tongue. He scorned her justification; he pointed to the blush which tinged her cheek—a blush of shame, not for herself but for his unmanly suspicion; he called it a witness against her; he discredited her pure truth, for, he said, his eyes had seen her listen to another’s words of love. So deceived, he would never trust again; henceforth he should be alone in the world.

“Oh! how could he look into her gentle face and doubt the heart which cried out after him in its great love, with an exceeding bitter cry, that he would not leave her in anger, that he would come back and recall his harsh words!

“Shall he have a merry Christmas, who left the gentle one alone with the reproaches he had heaped upon her,—alone on the deserted hearth, to bear her sorrow as she could? He who, when the news reached him that his father was gone away to his place,—that his home was broken up,—that over his sister and the poor pale brother, fragile from youth, hung the iron hand of poverty,—hugged the knowledge to his heart, with the bitter thought that it served them right—shall he have a merry Christmas?”

“No, no!” came forth from the little chorus singers, mournfully. “No Christmas for him; no merry Christmas!”

Then the dark man started to his feet suddenly, and great drops of moisture stood on his forehead, and a look of despair and remorse distorted his features. What dream had come to him this Christmas night,—what had he been doing?

The little spirits have hurried back amongst the few remaining red coals, and nothing is to be seen of them,—nothing is to be heard but the heavy breathing of the dark man, as he thinks over his dream.

* * * *

There was another Christmas fire which shone upon the oak floor of which the spirits had talked, and lighted up a few scattered evergreens; but the room was not decked for a merry party; there was no laughter, no song, no dance.

On the friendly hearth stands the gentle one; and there too, but not near her, is he who once placed a glistening ring upon her finger, and whose barbarous heel had ground it into a shapeless mass on that same hearthstone. In the shadow he stands, with a bent head, silent; for though she is there to listen to him, his heart fails when he thinks of the past, and he knows not what to say.

“Mary—” It seems he can go no further, so many words rush to his lips; and she stands there so statue-like—a figure about which hangs no tender memory from the past, no hope for the future.

“You sent for me—I am here.”

“Oh Mary! your heart is steeled against me, and justly. If words of mine could speak my deep repentance and remorse,—if years of penance could undo my madness, for I was mad,—if you could know how I shrink in horror from myself and the thought of what I have done, then I might hope something from your pity.”

Silent still, and statue-like. Oh, memory of

that other Christmas, come back and give him are shining in the blue eyes. All these weary months, all that hope!

"My brother has forgiven, and my sister. I would ask, will you be less merciful?—but that you have more, far more to forgive."

"Through all these weary months," says the listener on the hearth,—and his head sinks lower at the cold, dead tones,— "through all these weary months, there has been that within which told me you would one day know the wrong you did. Whatever there may have been to forgive, it is forgiven, long ago. The ring which you crushed is here. I have kept it for you; will you take it?"

"Oh, Mary, hear me! I am changed—changed. Your lip says, 'Forgiven,' but your voice denies it. Mary—"

But the hand trembles which he takes in his; he sees that her face is pale, and tears



all that cruelty, all those false accusations, have not crushed out from her heart its great love for him.

On the hearth they stand together, before the friendly fire; into that fire drops the crushed and battered pledge of a broken betrothal; let its memory melt away with its form. A change has passed over the sombre face of the dark man; a ray of beauty from hers brightens it as he looks down tenderly upon her and whispers, "Is it a happy Christmas, Mary?"

"It is happy." Then a bright glow starts up in the old grate, and the two cannot hear it perhaps; but there is a chorus amongst the little spirits of the Christmas fires, as they clap their hands and sing out, "We are here; we see it. A Merry Christmas!"

LOUIS SAND.